

VARIANT

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VIDEO POSITIVE 93



Britain's International Festival of
Creative Video and Electronic Media Art

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FRONT COVER IMAGE by d i s

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NATIONAL MUSEUMS & GALLERIES
ON MERSEYSIDE

BLUECOAT

EDITOR'S PREFACE

As a special edition of **Variant**, this year's VIDEO POSITIVE Catalogue aims to maintain the critical and challenging editorial remit established by this publication. The articles commissioned here cover a broad range of issues and subjects which in some instances may not comply with what one might immediately define as fine-art 'moving-image' production. But any attempt to define this area of practice is anomalous, comprised as it is of a heterogeneous and diverse range of formats and different practices from the combination of science and technology to broadcast media and film. By focusing on these different strands and by drawing on cultural theories and discourses the aim here has been to open up this area of practice in terms of the cultural sphere, that is on the level of meaning, issues and ideology.

Through referencing cyberfeminism and cyberpunk in '*Beyond the Screens...*', the writer and theoretician, **Sadie Plant** analyses advanced technologies and how these are articulated in the cultural realm in order to radically challenge our assumptions that such technological formats represent the domain of patriarchy, of the white, rational male. The confusions governing the relationship between art and science, between culture and technology are critically challenged posing little more than a '*Soft Future*', as argued by electronic media artist **Richard Wright**. In '*Separate Spaces*' the artist **Keith Piper** charts the use of technologies by contemporary Black Artists alongside the development of his own practice, to reiterate the challenging perspectives presented by Black practitioners working in Britain today in spite of often being denied equality of access. This issue of access is raised in '*The Collaboration Programme Interview*', an initiative which provides a range of community and education groups with the opportunity to express their viewpoints. The question of

whose voice is traditionally privileged within the museum/art-gallery exhibition context is addressed by **John Byrne** in '*Video Art, Identity and the Processes of Cultural Mapping*'. By referencing this revisionist argument, Byrne argues for a form of moving-image cultural production that can re-work the '*very economy of seeing*'. Similarly, **Sean Cubitt** asks the question '*What's Wrong With Video Criticism?*' to raise observations which are relevant to moving-image practice in general. Indeed the term 'moving-image' is itself misleading since it neglects the very real issue of the sound-track: how this is explored and what it can represent in terms of the various subject-positions offered the viewer/listener. These are some of the issues raised by **Jean Fisher** in her re-working of her previously commissioned article, '*Reflections on Echo - sound by women artists in Britain*'. How moving-image practice can survive and be developed is addressed by **John Wyver** in his manifesto-style piece '*Things They Do Better Than Us*', analysing the differences between Britain and the rest of Europe in the commissioning of public-broadcasting fine-art based projects. Finally, the importance of funding structures and how these can influence a practice is addressed in '*John Conomos: his work and thoughts on Australian video practice*' an interview by **Brian Langer**.

I'd like to thank the writers for contributing articles which I hope you'll find are both informative and polemical, discursive and challenging, contributing towards a stimulating and perhaps controversial debate. My thanks also extend to Malcolm Dickson, the editor of *Variant* magazine, for his invaluable support and advice.

Helen Cadwallader, March 1993. VIDEO POSITIVE 93 Catalogue Editor.

DIRECTOR'S PREFACE

Two factors have underpinned the development of the third Video Positive festival. Firstly, our commitment to increase the scope and range of events and activities supporting the installation programme and secondly, and equally importantly, our aim to provide greater opportunities for regional participation through an expanded programme of activities within communities and education. Happily, in both, I believe we've succeeded.

The structure of VIDEO POSITIVE 93 differs significantly from the first two manifestations. A dedicated festival period from May 1-9 contains more than 40 different events, performances, screenings and seminars, each illuminating and engaging with different and diverse formal, aesthetic and technical concerns of artists and makers. The installation programme, sited at Liverpool's four premier galleries, has been extended from its previous exhibition period of two weeks to run for the whole month of May.

One of our aims this year is to satisfy more clearly and cohesively the needs of a professional audience and that of wider interest groups. Seminars dealing with critical concerns of students and new artists are presented alongside specialist events for curators and exhibition

organisers. Talks and workshops lend weight to what must surely be the largest survey of creative video and electronic media art ever presented in the UK. Of course we're committed to developing the widest possible audience for the festival and - with an extended exhibition period - we hope to increase substantially on the number visitors who attended VIDEO POSITIVE 91.

The continued development of the festival and of **Moviola**, the organisation responsible for running it, in a climate and culture of near economic despair within the UK is a testament to the faith and foresight of many of our funders; the Arts Council of Great Britain, North West Arts Board and Liverpool City Council being key among them. Without the substantial support of these three organisations in particular, and the generous contributions from many other sources in general, the festival could not even attempt to match the scale and scope of many of its European counterparts.

With the visitor being offered more choice, more challenges, more often, I hope you will find VIDEO POSITIVE 93 fascinating, even frustrating, but always entertaining.

Eddie Berg, March 1993. VIDEO POSITIVE Director.



Press Enter by Peter Gudynas (Zap Art International)

SOFT FUTURE

by
Richard
Wright

Close your eyes. Now, imagine a world, the world of the future. What do you see?

Will you see a technological Utopia, a city of gleaming metal spires, orbiting spacecraft, a world spared from nuclear annihilation and united by a common belief in the benefits of rational progress? Nowadays, probably not. At most your vision is likely to be an end to recession, economic stability for at least a while, a new order of grey suited bureaucracy. Perhaps you see nothing at all, just a hazy mist of half forgotten ideals. But when I close my own eyes there is still something there lurking in the background, like a memory chopped up into disparate fragments. It coagulates, forming a surface - it is the surface of a computer screen.

Technology was the collective vision of the future in the West for quite some time. Now technology in its most virulent form as electronic media still tries to keep our beliefs about the future alive, by recreating them as images. With my mind's eye, I can see pictures projected on the screen inside my head. They are special effects movies, *Terminator 2*, *Robocop* and *The Lawnmower Man*, they are computer games, they are documentaries on virtual reality - and they are from the future. Media events seem to have become the repository of our ideas about what the future would be like, but their function is not just to represent those ideas, to symbolise a set of goals which are being actively pursued, but to actually become the future itself. For the construction of sensational scenes of fighting robots, space flight and mind expansion, use of the most advanced digital imaging technologies are necessary. Each new movie feels compelled to outdo previous efforts in the seamless surety of its effects. Every transformation must be shot full frame, without any cause for the viewer to claim sleight-of-hand; it must be utterly convincing, making any suspension of disbelief quite unnecessary. Technologically mediated narratives of 'the future' are used to construct the contemporary perceptions of technology itself. This perpetual and constantly re-invented future is represented today by imagery generated by modern computer technology like mathematical visualisations, scientific graphics, digital effects and animations of virtual environments full of 'images beyond imagination'.¹ Technology has become a shadow cast by the future onto the present.

But behind this screen of media technology lies a sense of loss. It is the loss of what Jean-Francois Lyotard called the 'grand narratives' of the West, in particular the enlightenment dream of rational progress. None of the utopian predictions of the past seem to have been fulfilled, there is no universal peace based on the impartiality of scientific thinking, no achievement of the leisure society, and the new generation has been described as the first to be economically worse off than their parents were. Science no longer delivers, and media presents just a memory of the future. Instead of trying to build a better tomorrow, we now use the latest media technology to simulate visions of the future in music videos and special effects films much more efficiently than having to change the world itself. This is not a *hard* future of imposing architectures and hurtling spaceships, but a *soft* future of media extravaganzas and digital effects, existing synthetically on the screen. The result is that we are living in a requiem for a future that never was, played by a virtual future that always is.

The ideal of continual progress has degenerated into that of constant novelty and distraction. Technology today has to struggle hard to keep up with the expectations that people have of it, always having to surprise them with something new. The imaging technologies needed to produce the effects in science fiction films are often more advanced than the state of the technology they seek to imitate, as though it is more important to see what an advance in technology would be like than for it to actually exist. It is not that science has ceased to grow and expand but that the areas in which we expected it to succeed and change our lives for the better seemed to have been deflected onto other paths.

The more that new media offers us in terms of creative potential and technical agency, the more that they become their own subject. Consider virtual reality technologies as the ultimate means of giving complete form to the full extent of the human imagination. When we look around us to see the results of their applications we see interactive games about more technological subject matter - giant battling robots, star fighters, mutant experiments - the creation of a world in image form that has otherwise proven too costly to achieve. Technology enters discourse not as fact, but to provide evidence of its own myth. Its hypothetical repercussions are as misplaced as discussions of the social impact of 'space travel' were in the '60s as though it were already an everyday event. Now that the promise of manned space flight to alien worlds has receded, NASA attempts to keep the magic alive by developing virtual exploration such as the 'telepresence' system. This remote sensing and control apparatus allows a user based on earth to experience the sights and sounds received by a robot that may be operating millions of miles away in deep space or on other planets. An interactive 'movie' created out of data accumulated by the Viking One has also been used to simulate a flight over the landscape of the planet Mars. This surrogate astronautics can be enjoyed in a consumer version by anyone with a home computer and a laserdisc player as though it is a video game. As well as visible phenomena, synthetic imagery can also be used to represent other astrophysical events such as magnetic fields and interstellar combustion as travel scenery. Thus we see the latest technology working hard to prevent the glamour of space science from fading.

Computers are advancing, in order to process more information, to generate more effects. Bereft of any humanitarian ideals, technological determinism is left to pursue increasing functionality and a spiralling extrapolation of its specifications. The goal for the electronic media artist is assumed to be that of increasing quantities of tools for more and more minutely controlled manipulations of the image. The range and diversity of functions for computer aided art and design work has multiplied to the extent that it outstrips our outmoded notions of creativity as aesthetic inventiveness. The insistence of this goal of unlimited expressive power seems to be an opportunity for the computer to display its features and abilities and invite our admiration, regardless of whether they meet a pre-existing artistic demand. The correct vehicle for this panorama of technical conquests is the showreel, the superlative form of state-of-the-art posturing.

No matter what technical potential a new medium promises, it must connect with a current cultural practice in order to be taken up by a community and exploited. This inevitably results in many of its expressive abilities being constrained or completely ignored because they are not relevant to the needs of a certain group. But a Western industrial society operating under the pressure of continual technical progress introduces a conflict into this situation. As more is always assumed to be better, it is assumed that the more technical features and options that a device provides the more it constitutes an advance on what has gone before. In the field of art and design this becomes a strategy of marketing computer media as providing a range of expressive means far beyond what was possible with 'traditional' media, even though many functions may have no obvious application. It is

considered up to the artist's boundless creativity to find interesting things for the new equipment to do. This highlights a fundamental contradiction at work in contemporary Western thinking. On the one hand there is a fiction based on the rational perfectibility of the material world through technical agency and an increasing of information exchange. This is manifested in the history of art as the modernist project of continual aesthetic innovation and increase in formal devices. But on the other hand are the operation of cultural practices as constructions restricting the use of knowledge and materials to within parameters considered relevant to its concerns, usually defined in historical and sociological terms?

When art is industrialised under the modernist rubric, the equation is biased towards greater expansion of the means of production for its own sake. Artistic creativity is judged to be an insatiable beast that cares only for the next stylistic advance or fashion through which it can excrete some ready made 'content'. The future of art is required to settle into the form of an unbroken stream of new expressive facilities. Thus the world of tomorrow is constantly pre-empted by the latest technological commodities and brought forward into today. The idea of the future as a place in time has been eradicated and replaced by the future as an attitude of mind embodied in a business strategy.

But the cultural reaction to this new futurology has been to undermine it by using it to reconstitute the past. Look at the explosion of references to science fiction periodicals and serials of the Fifties and Sixties that have occurred in contemporary media and advertising. If modernism has insisted on a logic of progress towards the ultimate explication of form, then postmodernism disrupts this by placing the project into a space outside the one way march into the future and leaves it circling aimlessly but frantically fabricating new styles and effects. The past of *Dan Dare*, *Robbie the Robot* and *Astonishing Tales* resurfaces as a memory of a future of arrogant optimism and coercive submission to technological imperialist ideals. The absurd machines of **Heath Robinson** from the '20s and '30s are recreated as computer animations that lament our belief in the value of scientific improvements to domestic life. In the original film *Terminator*, the murderous robot that comes from the future dresses as a leather clad motorcycle hoodlum. In the sequel *Terminator II*, the first robot returns as the hero protecting us from the new T-1000 robot that can take on any identity and seems impervious to force. Through T-1000, we experience a future which can take on a variety of threatening forms, as a trusted law enforcement agent or even as our own mother. We find we are now more inclined to trust the original terminator cyborg, still dressed as the romantic biker anti-hero of the past, coming on like the young Marlon Brando in *The Wild Ones*. But we need not entirely reject the liquid steel cyborg of *Terminator II*, remembering that James Cameron unfairly chose not to show us that the robot could just as easily have turned itself into the Schwarzenegger cyborg if it wanted. For the appearance of a uncertain future also frees us from the obligation to follow failed solutions.

Living without a future, the electronic image has become not a window onto an external tomorrow, but a mental projection. Like Freud's dream image, it is a screen on which we can interpret the signs of our desires and anxieties. But the computed image is not

read like the convenient symbolisms of a single inscribed idea or belief. It is a soft image, impressionable, amorphous and badly behaved, like the id of rationalism's ego. It contains the unconscious of technology, in which we find the roots of half submerged yearnings for new beginnings. Just as digital imaging allows the image in the cinema film to be transformed and recreated into any future world that is currently desired, so the trajectory of modern progress is deflected from its original course into a number of alternative scenarios.

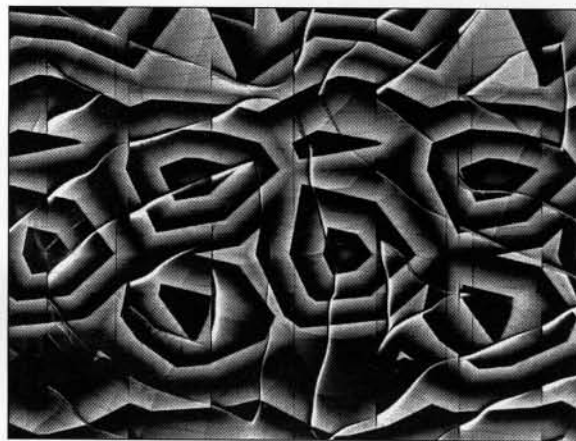
Digital technology has no form - look at your computers, they are all the same. They have no mechanical parts, they are just boxes of tiny silicon cubes. They are becoming smaller, they are becoming invisible. Soon they will disappear from the real world altogether and will exist only through the images they project. This technology does not act, it evokes. It can implant the images of hidden desires in our brains, there to grow and germinate.

The logic of technological determinism is now threatened with its imminent fall from grace as the future is replaced by the image, the soft image. This tolerance of the digital erodes the relentless historical surge of fundamentalisms towards their belief in their inevitable triumph. The prestaged conformist future of art can be compelled to yield by its dissolution in the very sea of images that had advertised its success. That media technology has no form of its own means that its appropriation by any power group can always be challenged.

When the human imagination tries to exercise its powers today it can find itself limited by current state-of-the-art technology. For our powers to conceive of new ideas and situations seem constricted to produce solutions in terms of technological developments rather than trying to think of a new social strategy or political force to replace the disappointments of the last decade. But this technological colonisation of the imagination provides a collision point from which a new stimulus can direct scientific advancement. Deprived of a clear vision of the future to work towards, the researchers at the 'blue sky' Californian science parks wrack their brains to find new challenges for their intellectual might. They must be put to sleep and learn to dream their own dreams until they can live without the comfort of the future. Remember the science fiction writers hired by the US military to brain storm ideas for new weapons and who came up with the Star Wars system of space borne laser guns. Now that the dissolution of the evil empire has removed the logic of that one-dimensional race for hardware supremacy, what can the science fiction writers offer us in the soft future? Our crystal ball is a video framestore and its pixels are already energising in response to our thoughts.

Through the digital image, society has started to dream again. The dream is a land beyond time - it can fit a whole lifetime of possibilities into the duration of a single night. Its future cannot be charted or planned; it is fuzzy, soft. A world without a future is a world of dreams. When we look into the computer screen we see the dreams of technology unfolding. But now they can be dreams which we can interpret to form our own lives.

Close your eyes.



Primordial Dance by Karl Sims (Thinking Machines Corp) 1991

Footnotes

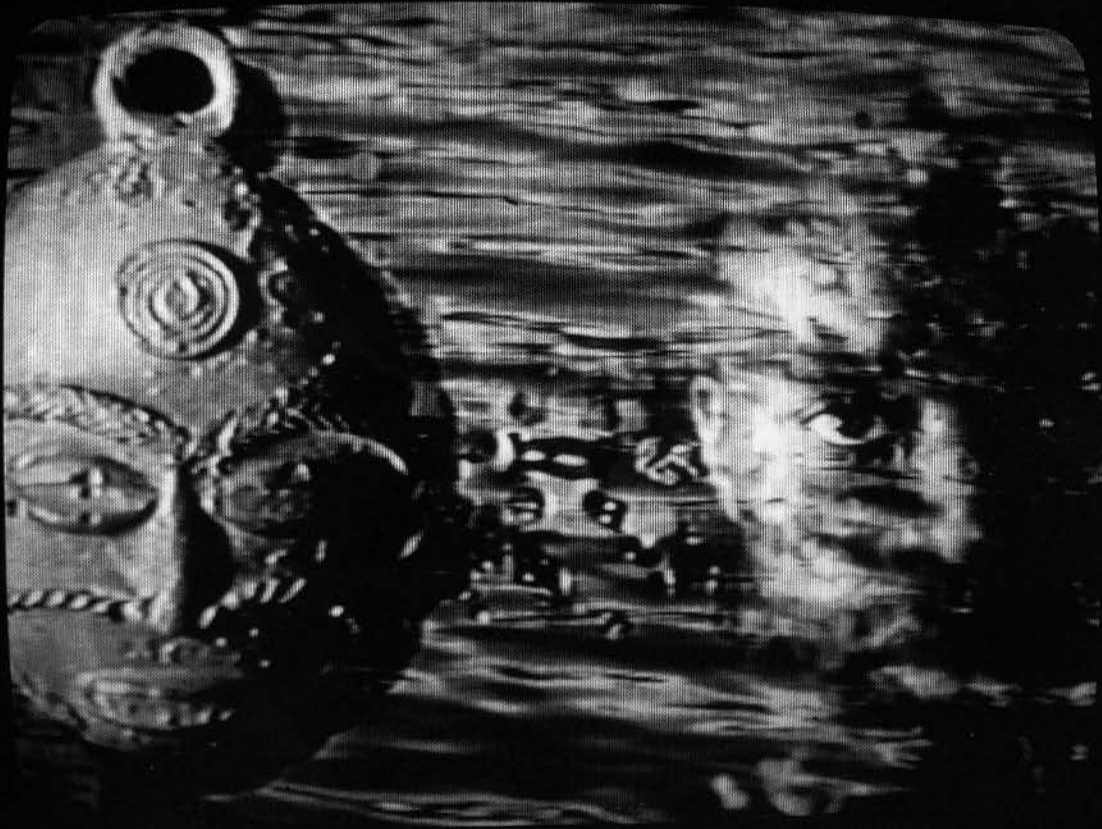
1. Imagina Conference, Monte Carlo, France, 1992.

Richard Wright is currently researching a book on the cultural and scientific implications of electronic visualisation.

VIDEO POSITIVE is hosting two seminars to discuss some of the above issues. 'Computer Media: in at the Deep End?' will be held at 2pm on 5.5.93 at Tate Gallery Liverpool. 'Big Science, Big Art' will be held at 2pm on 7.5.93 at Tate Gallery Liverpool.



Trade Winds by Keith Piper, 1992



SEPARATE SPACES

*A personal perspective
on black art and the new
technologies by
Keith Piper*

'The perspective through which no art activity by black people is seen to be possible outside the boundaries of their own specific cultural traditions in Asia, Africa and/or the Caribbean, is based solely on an assumption the full meaning of which can only be grasped within the context of the prevailing attitude of this society towards its non-white populations',

Rasheed Araeen, *'The Art Britain Really Ignores'*.¹

The 1976 publication of **Naseem Khan's** now infamous report, *'The Art Britain Ignores'*, left a whole series of fissures which have proceeded to shape and distort the cultural, economic and technological parameters within and against which Black Artists have been compelled to operate. Within the report, Khan critically questioned 'Ethnic Art' as a term which contextualised the activities of 'non-white' artists within the confines of the traditional or 'heritage' art forms of their particular 'ethnic' backgrounds. 'Non-white' artists were, in effect, debarred from the possibility of making any *innovative intervention* into the realm of contemporary mainstream practice. It also highlighted the implausibility of the 'Third World' 'ethnic artist' being able to meaningfully interact with the explicitly 'first world' arena of the new electronic media and technologies.

In the late Seventies and early Eighties, as the term 'Black Art' began to seep into contemporary artspeak, it is of little surprise that its most vocal advocates were continually at pains to stress its diametric opposition not only to the apolitical indulgences of 'art for art's sake', but also to the traditionalist, conservative 'craftiness' of so called 'ethnic art'. This opposition to the traditional hand crafted object motivated the initial development of a technology centred practice on the part of a range of Black Artists in the early Eighties. When one key figure, **Eddie Chambers**² put down the paint brush with which he painted sections of the Union Jack with Swastikas in his *Destruction of the NF* (1979-80) in favour of the photocopying machine, by doing so he was engaging in a process through which the technologies of instant low cost photomechanical image duplication were being brought to the centre stage in the contest over what could be seen to constitute not just 'Black Art', but in

fact contemporary British art practice.

Within these terms, the photocopy was utilised as the most efficient means of reprocessing and representing photo-journalistic images in a highly politicised and didactic context, rather than for any aesthetic or anti-craft shock-value reasons. As a strategy, this was in line with the declared aims of many artists working at this time. From an article by Chambers entitled, *'Black Artists for Uhuru'* published in 1983, we read that: *'Black art, at the very least, should indicate, and/or document change. It should seek to effect such change by aiming to help create an alternative set of values necessary for better living...'*³

A number of Black Artists from this period and earlier, and in isolation from each other, were also utilising photo-mechanical reproductive technologies to produce work which, in part, mirrored the didactic aims outlined by Chambers. Artists such as **Chila Burman** in pieces such as her *Militant Women* (1982) and **Gavin Jantjes** in his anti-Apartheid screen prints exhibited at the Edward Totah Gallery in 1980, both utilised the expanding interface between conventional printmaking and these new photo reproductive technologies to explore and discuss contemporary political issues.

During this period of the early to mid-Eighties, Black Artists also took up technological formats such as photography and film, as witnessed in the significant achievements of Black British film-makers working in the independent and workshop sector, such as **Isaac Julien**. It is almost impossible to regard these as discrete and separate areas of practice as artists clearly utilised a mixture of different mediums.

It is against this background of a relatively broad based and multi-faceted engagement with areas of technology based practice by British based Black Artists that my own transition into - and orientation within - the area must be viewed.

During the early Eighties, a cauldron of political ideologies and rhetoric - gleaned from sources as geographically diverse as the writings of the '60s Black American activists such as Malcolm X and George Jackson, the Black nationalist and Afrocentric lyrics of Jamaican reggae musicians, and the home grown barricade poetry of a riot torn and flaming urban Britain - all combined to evoke a highly didactic set of creative sensibilities on the part of (largely male) Black visual Artists. Influenced by such sources, my own work of this period employed a range of strategies incorporating the use of traditional art materials, canvas and paint, hand written text, multi-media sculptural elements and image reprographic technologies such as photography, photo silk-screen and photocopies as a means to articulate content. Throughout the mid-Eighties this strategy of collaging together different elements expanded from the two-dimensional to the three-dimensional in the use of installation-based strategies. These developments ran concurrent with a growing interest in integrating technology based elements in installation practice. Tape, slide and film loop began to play an increasing role, whilst sound became the medium through which any text based content of a piece was voiced, supplanting the unwieldy dependence on hand written and printed text which had characterised earlier work.

Far from being an excursion into a culturally and technologically alien domain, this use of recorded sound and acoustic based technologies had a familiarity which, in itself, begins to raise interesting questions. This point reveals aspects of the multi-faceted relationship between race, class and gender on the one hand, and technology on the other, untouched by fixed notions of 'ethnicity' and cultural practice.

During the '70s, many of us working class black teenagers, myself included, had been drawn towards the cultural and recreational space which surrounded the so called 'Sound System'. The Sound System comprised of over-powered amplifiers driving oversized loudspeakers in hand built cabinets, catering to the unique demands of reggae music. An obsessive fetishism around the power of amplification combined with the complex networking and juxtaposing of multiple speakers became our key area of expertise. As the technology offered increasingly diverse ways of manipulating and interacting with the received cultural product, the record (not only through the Disc-Jockey's voice-over, but also through an expanding array of equalisers, syn-drums, complex sound generators, reverb and echo units), so our fascination with the manipulative and regenerative power of technology expanded.

Such youth culture involvement provided an initial

engagement with technology based practice which eventually resurfaced through the interests and creative orientation of a number of Black Artists. One such artist is **Trevor Mathison**, who having passed through a formal Fine Art training, re-engaged with his interest in the use and manipulation of sound by developing innovative and highly characteristic 'sound landscapes' in his sound-track work for the films of the Black Audio Film Collective, of which he is a long-term member. **Gary Stewart**, similarly trained, developed an interest in hand built electronic sound manipulation devices and in the computer based MIDI technology. This in turn led to expertise in the various creative applications of the Apple Macintosh range of computers which has been put to good use in developing Artec's London-based 'Multi-Media Workshop' as a centre for innovative electronic image production, where he is currently based.

Although my own teenage involvement in audio technology was relatively basic in comparison, it was to resurface in my installation work of the mid to late Eighties. In August 1987, I used multi-track sound combined with a four projector dissolve sequence in *Adventures Close to Home*, (exhibited at Pentonville Gallery) which examined the shifting boundaries of excessive policing: or combined as part of a 'scratch' video displayed across seven television sets in *Another Empire State* shown at Battersea Art Centre in September of the same year. This explored some of the links between British capital and Apartheid.

What characterised these projects in terms of content, was a growing theoretical distance from the didactic language of political certainty which had characterised earlier work. Although centring their point of focus upon the examination and exploration of specific social and political issues, the work deliberately avoided a prescriptive diatribe based on any pre-formed political ideology. Instead, the work was content to reference and juxtapose fragments of information, allowing the spectator to work around a multiple set of potential readings.

In a real sense this re-positioning concurred with a wider set of trends current in the work of Black Artists during this period. The aggressive 'confrontationalist' mode of utterance which had been favoured, largely by young male artists in the early Eighties, had been supplanted by a more reflective 'invitational' mode of address characteristic of Black women's work. Concurrent with this shift was a greater emphasis upon the historical continuity of Black resistance, which often expressed itself through a sense of pictorial and aesthetic nostalgia by which artists strove to re-acknowledge the political and cultural achievements of their parents generation.

At first glance, this development appears to drift dangerously close to the old formulas of 'ethnic art' but within the particular technologies employed by those artists and the particular political resonances evoked, a whole complex of reflective readings - each one pertinent to contemporary sensibilities - came to be generated.

Within my own practice, technologies such as photography, tape slide and audio multi-tracking were employed to construct work which referenced imagery and sounds from a multiplicity of historical and contemporary sources and re-juxtaposed them, opening up a range of sometimes ambiguous and contradictory readings. It was, however, only through a growing involvement with the use of computer based technologies, that such aesthetic aims could be more comprehensively explored.

My first encounter with Commodore's Amiga computer came in about 1988. It was a period during which the high cost of the Apple Macintosh range proved inhibitive whilst the publicity surrounding the Amiga 500 appeared to offer a versatile and affordable tool for use in a creative environment, although this potential has yet to be completely fulfilled due to the promotion of the Amiga as 'games machine'. In spite of these anomalies, the Amiga has come to occupy centre stage within my working environment. In terms of sound, the '8-bit' samples which the basic machine was capable of manipulating have remained horribly muffled, but offer the scope to construct quite complex collages of fragments of voice and other textures of sound, providing the 'cross-referentiality' sought within what I perceive to be the new creative agendas. It is interesting, at this point, to draw a direct comparison between this interest in the collaging and cross referencing of sound within Black Art practice and the more highly developed arena of contemporary Rap and House music from which many of us drew influences.

The music of **Public Enemy**, the **Jungle Brothers** or more recently **Arrested Development**, is also characterised by an eclectic collaging of information from a disparate range of sources which are then juxtapositioned within a dominant text. Such features also co-exist with a cacophony of sub and counter texts, some of which remain haunting, others are simply deeply contradictory.

It is these particular characteristics of Rap music which I have attempted to construct in my computer based visual arts practice. The Amiga had the ability to sample, or 'digitise' images from any video source into a file of manageable size and up to (a currently unimpressive but at that time very exciting) 4096+ colours and to collage those images together using electronic paint-box tools. This technology provided the visual equivalent of Rap music's collaged layers of sampled sounds. The biggest difficulty with using the Amiga in this way, lay in the mechanical problem of getting a usable image out of the machine. The first solution involved simply pointing a still camera at the computer screen. I first used this rather low-tech method to collage imagery together for a tape-slide piece exploring the marketing of black masculinity in an exhibition entitled *Black Markets*, held at Cornerhouse, Manchester in September 1990. A similar method was used, but this time outputting to slides as well as colour stills which were then reprocessed on a colour photocopier, in various contexts in a series of installations entitled *A Ship*

Called Jesus, held at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham in January 1991. More significantly, this exhibition included a three monitor video-installation featuring animated Amiga images.

These animations were made by exploiting the Amiga's ability to flick through a series of 4096 colour images (on a basic 'un-accelerated' machine) at about 8 to 12 frames per second coupled with the relative simplicity of encoding these animations onto a PAL video signal and then recording this to video. Subsequent animations were produced on Amigas which were upgraded in terms of memory and speed with installed Genlocks. This allowed a longer sequence of frames to be looped enabling them to be flicked through at greater speed which helped off-set the inherently poor resolution of the images. This development meant that animated sequences could be superimposed over sequences drawn from other computer or video sources. I have used these particular methods of animated computer montage in multi-monitor video installations produced for exhibitions such as *PhotoVideo* organised by Impressions Gallery, York in 1991. This was a four monitor piece entitled *Tagging the Other* which explored issues concerning race, nationality, technologies of social monitoring and the 'New Europe'. I have produced installations exploring other themes such as Black masculinity in exhibitions from Rochdale to Holland.

It is within the context of this body of animated computer montage that a piece such as *Trade Winds* explores issues of shipping and trading legacies through the use of a dislocated animated black body spread across an arrangement of four monitors, each set in its own crate. The full range of ideas around notions of collaging, of juxtapositioning, of dominant and sub-text, of cultural and historical referencing, of layers of ambiguous and sometimes contradictory readings, as discussed in this article, are also present in this installation *Trade Winds*.

The interface between the work of Black Artists in Britain and the arenas of new technology and electronic media is complex and constantly evolving. Black Artists who are often denied equality of access, in comparison with their white counterparts, to the relatively resource-dependant field of cutting-edge creative technology have, nevertheless, prioritised the integration of computer based and electronic media in their practice. It is this ongoing commitment to the tools of modernity, whilst retaining a commitment to the discussion of issues of contemporary relevance, which effectively derails any residual attempts to consign Black Artists to the ghetto of 'ethnic art'.

Footnotes

1. Rasheed Araeen, *'The Art Britain Really Ignores'*, *Making Myself Visible*, Kala Press, London, 1984 p 101.
2. Rasheed Araeen, *'The Emergence of Black Consciousness in Contemporary Art in Britain'*, *The Essential Black Art*, The Chisenhale Gallery (London), 1980 p 6.
3. Eddie Chambers, *'Black Artists for Uhuru'*, *Moz-Art Magazine*, March-July 1983, p 34.

Is Technology encoded in masculine terms?

Technology is a masculine thing. It is usually taught by men. It has a thirty year rule, a legacy of male dominated training right from primary schools to Masters Degrees. The last decade has seen more women study technological subjects, therefore, it will be another twenty years before an equilibrium; and that's being optimistic!

Lei Cox, Artist and Lecturer at The Scottish School of Film and Television and VIDEO POSITIVE 93 Artist.

Is video technology 'encoded in masculine terms', this is an old argument. First of all it assumes that men and women have nothing in common and secondly, that the language of technology is fixed and immutable. It is not. Like any other language, technology is subject to social, economic and cultural forces as well as the irreducible and irrepressible force of the human spirits that manipulate it. But women are resourceful individuals in spite of limited support, it is impossible to silence their voices and suppress their vision. What really matters is that our work is shown, that it exists and stands as a challenge to the mainstream both on television and in an art gallery context.

Catherine Elwes, Artist.

Technology should not be confused with language. Although language is encoded in gender specific terms, technology is a significantly more ambiguous and contradictory element. All good art subverts technology.

Michael Maziere, Director of London Video Access.

If one considers terminology such as 'terminate', 'abort', 'kill' and 'execute' as gendered, then one would agree that these terms could be seen as masculine; as such it is unsurprising that as an artist, one is most likely to come across these terms in the 'size-is-everything' cyberstudio of 3D graphics/animation. The problem facing many women (and some men) accessing 'cyberspace' has less to do with its encoding than in the (actual) environment in which one gains access. The production process of a piece of work that does not necessarily embrace the latest, fastest, most powerful machinery can be readily condemned as lightweight by computer bullies unconcerned with content. Women working with new media, in general, are less in love with the technology than what it can do for them; with 'information inflation' a relentless reality, it is an irreverence that could be well emulated elsewhere.

Susan Collins, Artist, currently Research Fellow in Interactive Media, West Surrey College of Art and Design.

If technology and video in particular is thought to be encoded in masculine terms, there are liberating moments when it dances to other tunes. There is work which layers images and texts together, which rhythmically repeats itself, and which is shown in ambient installations. These challenges to a masculinist linear form are increasingly the province of men as much as women!

Angela Kingston, Exhibitions Officer, Ikon Gallery.

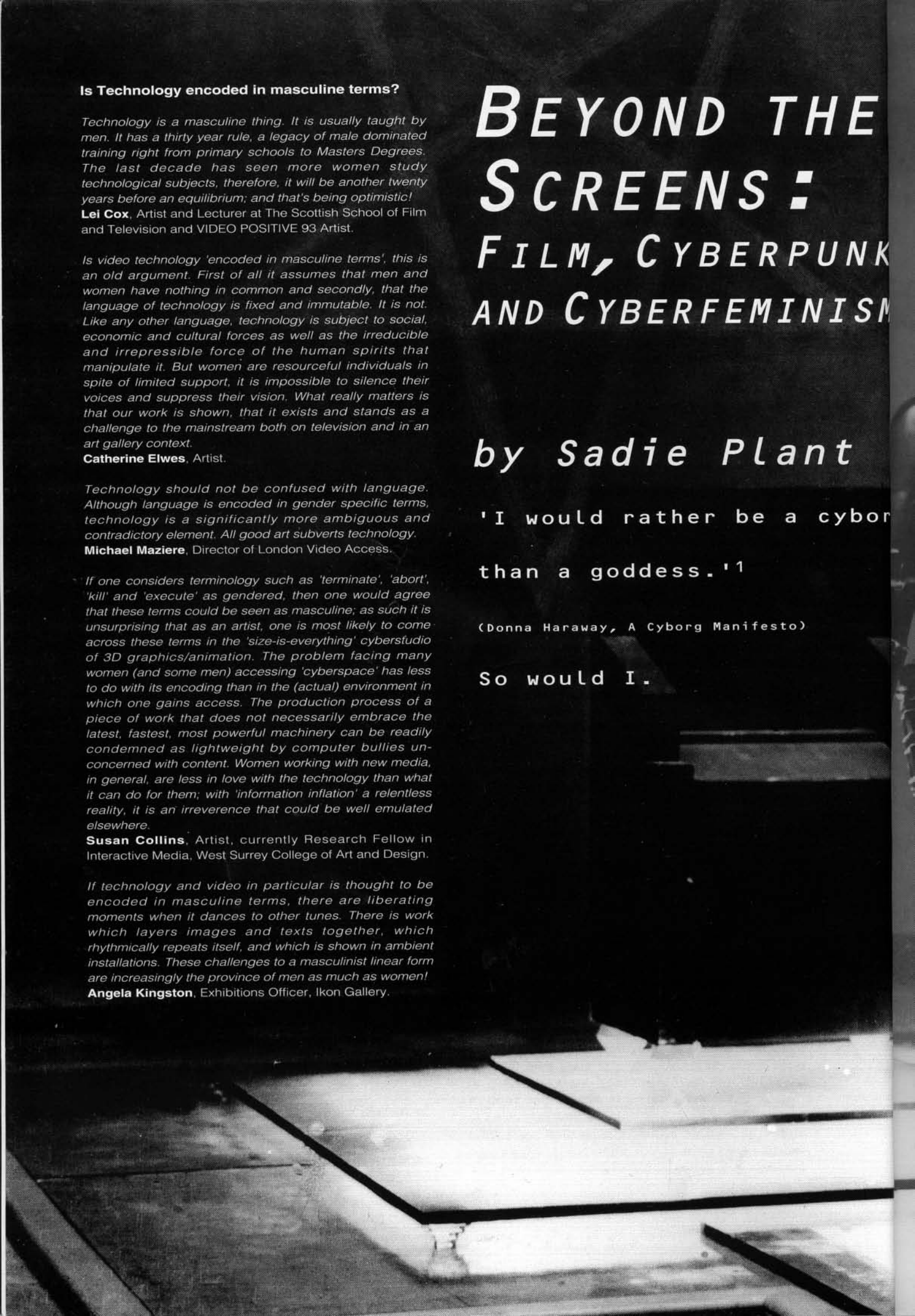
BEYOND THE SCREENS: FILM, CYBERPUNK AND CYBERFEMINISM

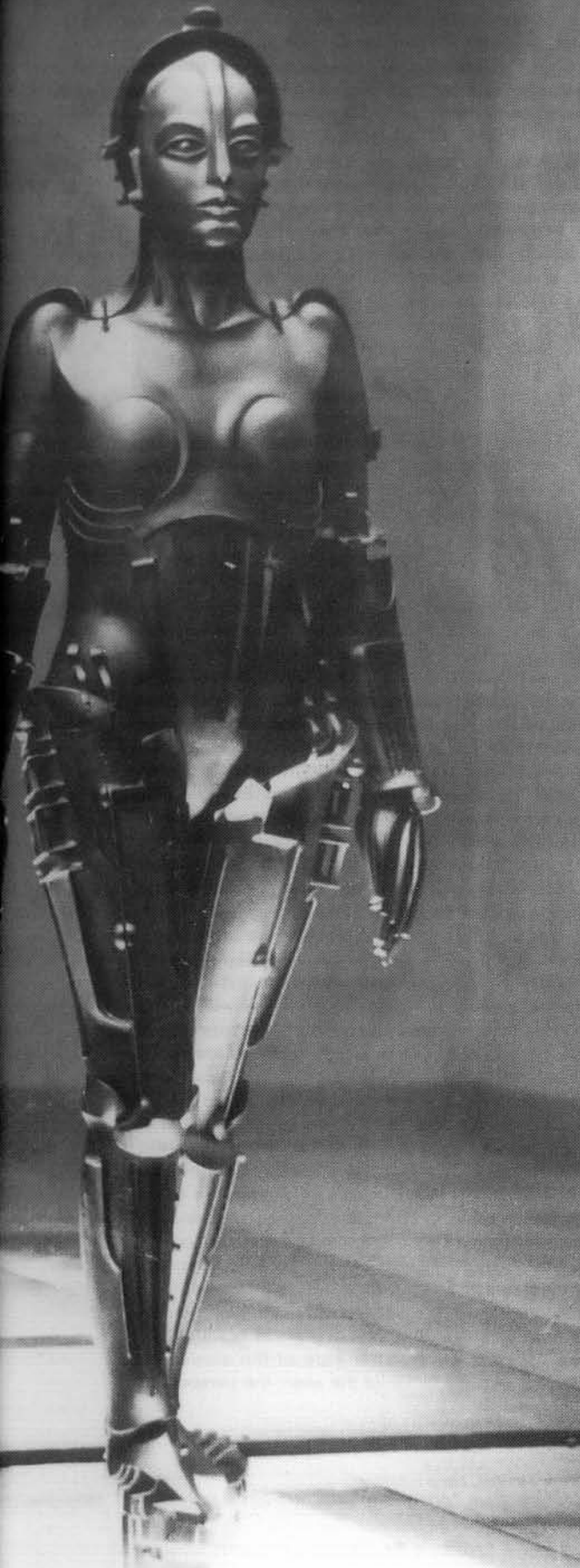
by Sadie Plant

'I would rather be a cyborg
than a goddess.'¹

(Donna Haraway, A Cyborg Manifesto)

So would I.





Metropolis directed by Fritz Lang. This image has been reproduced courtesy of BFI Distribution/ Transit Films.

Machines and women have at least one thing in common: they are not men. In this they are not alone, but they do have a special association, and with recent developments in information technology, the relationship between women and machinery begins to evolve into a dangerous alliance. Silicon and women's liberation track each other's development.

The beginnings of this convergence can be heard in the tekno beat of rave music; read in the up-tempo pages of cyberpunk fiction, from both male writers, like **William Gibson** and **Greg Bear**, and women writers, such as **Pat Cadigan** and **Octavia Butler**, and seen in films from *Robocop* to *Until the End of the World*. It is the process by which the world becomes female, and so post-human. †

Cyberfeminism is information technology as a fluid attack, an onslaught on human agency and the solidity of identity. Its flows breach the boundaries between man and machine, introducing systems of control whose complexity overwhelms the human masters of history. Secreted in culture, its future begins to come up on the screen, downloaded virally into a present still striving, with increasing desperation, to live in the past. Cyberfeminism is simply the acknowledgement that patriarchy is doomed. No one is making it happen: it is not a political project, and has neither theory nor practice, no goals and no principles. It has nevertheless begun, and manifests itself as an alien invasion, a program which is already running beyond the human.

The connection between women and technology has been sedimented in patriarchal myth: machines were female because they were mere things on which men worked; because they always had an element of unpredictability and tended to go wrong, break down. No matter how sophisticated, the machine is still nature, and therefore understood to be lacking in all the attributes of the man: agency, autonomy, self-awareness, the ability to make history and transform the world. Women, nature and machines have existed for the benefit of man, organisms and devices intended for the service of a history to which they are merely the footnotes. The text itself is patriarchy, the system within which women occupy a world of objects, owned by men and exchanged between them. After Oedipus, the connection between castration and blindness, the penis and sight, seals the fate of woman within the phallic organisation of a specular economy for which she is the sold as seen. As the French feminist theoretician, Luce Irigaray suggests, this is a strategy which has meant that there is only one human species, and it is male: homo sapiens. There are no other sapiens. Woman is a virtual reality.

Women, however, have always found ways of circumventing the dominant systems of communication which have marginalised their own speech. And while man gazed out, looking for the truth, and reflecting on himself, women have never depended on what appears before them. On the contrary, they have persisted in communicating with each other and their environment in ways which the patriarch has been unable to comprehend, and so has often been interpreted as mad, or hysterical. Now these lines of communication between women, long repressed, are returning in a technological form. Hypertext destroys linearity, allowing the user to enter the density of writing, and

disrupting every conception of the straightforward narrative. The immediacy of women's communion with each other, the flashes of intuitive exchange, and the non-hierarchical systems which women have established in the networking practices of grass roots feminist organisations: all these become the instant access of telecommunication, the decentered circuits and dispersed networks of information. The screens of cinematic and televisual experience become touch sensitive, transforming the gaze and collapsing its vision into the tactile worlds of virtual reality.

When Freud named weaving as woman's sole achievement, a remnant of the veiling of her own desire, it had been automated for more than a century. Jacquard's loom was the first step to software, a vital moment in the development of the cybernetic machine. Ada Lovelace, the first computer programmer, said of Babbage's Analytic Engine: it '*weaves algebraical patterns just as the Jacquard loom weaves flowers and leaves*'.² Today the American photographer Esther Parada writes: '*I like to think of the computer as an electronic loom strung with a matrix image, into which I can weave other material... I hope to create an equivalent to Guatemalan textiles, in which elaborate embroidery plays against the woven pattern of the cloth*'.³ With digitalisation, weaving no longer screens woman's desire, but allows it to flow in the dense tapestries and complex depth of the computer image. The data streams and information flows of cybernetic machines are the transformation and return of sensuality and the extra-sensory perceptions denied by the rational speculations of human history.

Enlightenment history dreams of a world of its own design and institutes man as the privileged agent of change: the world must be answerable to him, and wherever possible, it is he who must be seen to be making it happen. In his ideal world, he really would be running the whole show, master of all he surveys; in the late Twentieth Century, this is the show which begins to go out of control. In spite of every attempt at domestication, the agents of history have now to contend with runaway economies, overheating atmospheres, computers which can beat them at chess, and gun-toting women like Thelma and Louise. These are occasions for regret to those nostalgic for the days when planning and mastery seemed unproblematic. They are also symptoms of an emerging cybernetic environment which, as Donna Haraway suggests in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, allow us to learn '*how not to be a Man, the embodiment of Western Logos*'.⁴

There is no doubt that the wares of technology, hard and soft, old and new, are always intended as toys for the boys; technical development has always been a consequence of man's attempt to perpetuate and extend his dominion. This is the basis of many feminist critiques of technology, which is said to be developed without and against women, and used only as an extension of masculine power. And it is all true: fuelled by dreams of light and flight, the machinery which feeds into the cultural images of the late Twentieth Century has its roots in a struggle against nature which has also been the repression of the feminine; a drive for security inscribed in the militarisation of the planet. As Virilio points out, cinema has always been a spin-off from war⁵; video, High Definition TV and virtual reality are

equally the after-images of the weapons and surveillance systems, networks of communications and intelligence developed for use in advanced theatres of war like the Persian Gulf.

Yet it is these technologies, the pinnacles of man's supremacy, the high-tide of his speculations, that leave his world vulnerable to cyberfeminist infection. Hooked up to the screens and jacked into decks, man becomes the user, the addict, who can no longer insist on his sovereign autonomy and separation from nature. Increasingly integrated with the environment from which he always considered himself distinguished, he finds himself travelling on networks he didn't even know existed, and entering spaces in which his conceptions of reality and identity are destroyed. This is the return of the repressed, the return of the feminine, perhaps even the revenge of nature. But that which returns is transformed: no longer passive and inert, nature has become an intelligent machine, a self-regulating system. Nature was always the matrix it becomes: once the passive womb, a space for man; now weaving itself on the integrated circuit.

One only has to glance at the back cover of a cyberpunk novel to get the gist of the world produced by this dynamic. Pat Cadigan's *Synners* '*plunges us into a fast-moving, high-tech future - exotic, exciting and very dangerous. It's a world where new technology spawns new crime even before it hits the streets. A world where computer viruses appear all but human. A world where new drugs are the order of the day - every day. A world where the human mind and the external landscape have fused to the point that reality is constantly being moulded, destroyed then re-created...*'.

Cyberpunk has precursors in **Ballard's** myths of the near future and the drug-infused cut-ups of **Burroughs**; techniques which collide with the anarcho-libertarian politics and streetwise mania of punk. Populated by self-designing systems and artificial intelligences, simulated identities and cyborgs, metaverses and cyberspaces, terminals and consoles, prosthetic limbs and the complexities of computer generation, microbiological life, and self-guiding systems, cyberpunk takes the shopping malls, cities, climatic changes, computer networks, designer drugs, viruses, multinationals, hackers, and outlaws of the present into a future in which reality becomes a simulated program, and identity a transient manifestation in cyberspace. Cyberpunk is like a free port, a grid reference for free experimentation, an atmosphere in which there are no barriers, no restrictions on how far it is possible to go...

Not that one has to go too far before things start getting weird. Cyberpunk's future is no longer an horizon in endless recession, but even now surges into the present. Released from distant galaxies, its aliens are already ensconced in our midst; its women are brave and insidious, drawing strength from their difference to humanity and their very alienation from human society, rather than any desire to play a full role within it. Convinced that the '*technological destruction of the human condition leads not to future-shocked zombies but to hopeful monsters*',⁶ cyberpunk is not afraid to take us through to the other side of the screen, to experiments with the vision of the alien, the perspective of the inhuman.



Entoverse by Peter Gudynas (Zap Art International)

Cyberpunk does nothing to persuade us that the world it describes is a good world, a better world, a desirable world at all. From the perspective of a socialist or humanist feminism, its fictions are dystopian visions of a future gone wrong; a world for which the revolution never happened. While cyberpunk is often detested for this realism, an increasing number of feminist critics see the possibilities of cyberpunk, in the distance its women have travelled from the days when nurture and passivity were the charms of the science fiction heroine. Joan Gordon applauds the fact that more women are writing cyberpunk fictions: '*I for one am not convinced that I am an earth mother. What else might I be? If science fiction can show what it means to be female in the world toward which we hurtle, I want to read it.*'⁷

Cyberpunk has been writing the software, but popular film has proved itself one of the leading media for the display of cyborgs, virtual worlds, and other cybernetic leaps. The technologies it represents begin to exceed the medium of film itself: **Wim Wenders** can use HDTV, but *The Lawnmower Man* can only show filmic representations of VR, not simply because technology of the quality displayed in the film has yet to be developed, but also because even in its earliest and crudest forms, virtual reality brings the user into a space beyond the screens of the cinematic form.

It is not film, however, but the stories in which it continues to frame these technologies which are obsolete. Unlike cyberpunk, most films dealing with information technology tend to dress it in tales of gods and forefathers, man's search for power, immortality, and self-discovery. These are traditional narratives which make every effort to place the most alien of technologies in the most comfortable and reassuring of contexts, to read the future in terms of the past. Christianity confronts cyberspace in *The Lawnmower Man*, the drive for law and order meets the cyborg in *Robocop* and countless other cyborg thrillers. Not surprisingly, the feminine is always the weak link in these patrilineal chains. *Until the End of the World* treats us to a display of female vulnerability to the seductions of a machine intended to reinforce family values. In *Eve of Destruction*, a dangerous female cyborg threatens revenge on man and gets her kicks from orgasmic car crashes rather than the male body.

Nevertheless, because of the simplicity of their stories, these films often relate the most telling of tales. In *Eve of Destruction*, a cyborg, Eve VIII, is developed as a lethal military machine by the US government. In appearance and psychological make up, she is a sophisticated simulation of the scientist who created her. Caught up in a bank raid on her first trial run, she escapes the control of the military institution for which she was designed, buys a red leather jacket and a more than adequate supply of heavy duty weapons.

Eve VIII is a cyborg, a simulation of the feminine and the ultimate male paranoia trip. She is, as the colonel hired to kill her says, '*a machine without a fucking off-switch*'; and can only be terminated with an accurate bullet through the eye. In conversation with Eve Simmons, the scientist whose achievement Eve VIII is, he gives voice to a revealing technophobia. Admitting he's the perfect military man, he makes his own antipathy to technology clear. '*Don't get me wrong*', he

says, 'I'm not some right wing extremist. I just think we should show a little more backbone when dealing with some of the evils of this world. Like international terrorism, for example. Also, junk mail, automatic tellers, and cars that talk back to you.' For the colonel, these phenomena clearly have a definite connection with the decline of civilisation.

Eve VIII is equipped with a nuclear device in the neck of her womb, the void already veiled by the woven screens of virtual technology. If the cyborg is still, like Freud's woman, nowhere to be seen, this is only because of the possibility of a blinding flash of annihilation unleashed by her military programming. As a simulation of her creator, the cyborg is also guided by the scientist's memories, dreams, and desires, and when Eve VIII gains her freedom, she begins to enact the scientist's sexual fantasies with a ridiculous bravery. As she watches the cyborg's revenge on her own repression, Eve Simmons says: 'She's doing things I might think about doing but would never be courageous enough to do.'

The film ends with a return to family values, with the scientist forced to choose her human child over her cyborg sister. But the message is clear: women and machines make a disastrous combination. Everything goes wrong: the machinery breaks down and the women can't cope. Women who become too integrated with technology either become dangerous weapons, built against women, but turned against man, or they go mad, like the woman in *Until the End of the World*, who becomes addicted to replays of her own unconscious. Either way, the convergence of machine and the repressed unconscious of woman make a threatening alliance. The message is that it's all best left to the boys. Popular film perpetuates the myth, but also puts it on display, a declaration of the importance of keeping women and technology apart.

These films are developments of older stories about mad women and female replicants which provided films like *Bladerunner* and *Metropolis* with their central themes, already shifting patriarchal fears of the wildness and unpredictability of nature to the dangers of the cybernetic machine.

Although most popular film which deals with information technology is less adventurous than cyberpunk fiction, tekno films are now released into a zone already mapped by cyberpunk. Like *Robocop* and *Terminator*, they begin to experiment with machine vision and delve into the cyberpunk worlds of virtual spaces and cybernetic organisms. These are films in which machinery is no longer simply on the screen; scenarios in which humanity itself is under observation from an alien, inhuman perspective. Just as woman escapes her role as spectacular glamour on the silver screen and starts making her own films, recording her own vision, so technology begins to assume a gaze of its own.

The cinematic screen is no longer the simple surface on which man projects his own self-image and the images that will sustain it. Neither are the screens which patriarchy has erected around its own history any longer secure, the filters with which it has kept out the aliens, the visions and messages, and all the messiness of the world which might throw it off course. The cyborg's vision is simply a screen on which reality is displayed,

revealing the possibility that human perception is itself a mechanism which accepts its pixelled vision as reality, just as the cyborg knows only its screen. When simulated realities themselves find their way into popular film, as in *The Lawnmower Man* and, more subtly, films like *Total Recall* and *Videodrome*, they further storm the reality studio: if reality can be simulated, even the screen disappears. The stability of the real is no longer simply confused by a multiplicity of screens, but by its integration with the very mechanisms of perception. The surfaces grow dense, the screens crack up, and it is no longer possible to distinguish between actual and virtual realities.

Virtual reality: the simulation of space, the pixelled manifestation of another zone. Bought on the street, VR is still crude: cyberspace is too jerky and as yet, the programmes are self-contained and overdetermined. Even within these limits, the VR machine begins to allow its users to choose their disguises and assume alternative identities: 'would madam like blue eyes or brown, round ears or pointed ones?' Enthusiasts celebrate this diversity as a liberation from necessity, and off-the-shelf identity is an exciting new adventure for the user of virtual reality. Women, who know all about disguise, are already familiar with this trip. Imitation and artifice, make-up and pretence: they have been role-playing for millennia: always exhorted to 'act like a woman', to 'be ladylike'; always to be like something, but never to be anything in particular, least of all herself. There is as yet no such thing as being a real woman. To be truly human is to be a real man. 'Woman does not yet exist', except as she appears on the set: wife and mother, sister and daughter: always performing duties, keeping up appearances, the acting head of the household.

Women have of course been roped into the patriarchal privileging of identity, so that much feminist struggle has been devoted to the search for the true self, the missing ingredient which would give women a full and equal place in human society. Cyberfemininity is something quite different. It is not a subject lacking an identity, but a virtual reality, whose identity is a mere tactic of infiltration. VR is a disturbance of human identity far more profound than pointed ears, or even gender bending, or becoming a sentient octopus. Those who believe these to be the limits of its impact are duped by dissimulation and the present state of its development. Cyberspace certainly tempts its users with the ultimate fulfilment of the patriarchal dream, leaving the proper body behind and floating in the immaterial. But who is adrift in the data stream? All identity is lost in the matrix, where man does not achieve pure consciousness, final autonomy, but disappears on the matrix, his boundaries collapsed in the cybernetic net. Like women, all technologies have to be camouflaged as toys for the boys, and virtual reality is itself an alien in disguise.

The cyborg is also undercover; as *Robocop*, it masquerades as the vanguard of human security, the more real man, the military machine. But even this figure is already an inhuman mutation; neither man, machine, nor even man becoming machine, the cybernetic organism is itself a symptom of cyberfeminist invasion, the introduction of the cybernetic system to even the most sacrosanct of organisms: the human. This destruction of the human identity boundary is also the vanguard of attempts to secure its dominion. The

muscular cyborgs of popular film are creatures of law enforcement, security, policing, and surveillance; deployed, like Eve VIII, to safeguard the values and interests of human security, this is a mission they accomplish only by complicating control and proliferating chaos, disrupting security in the very process of reinforcing it. The cyborg betrays every patriarchal illusion, dragging the human into an alien future in which all its systems of security are powerless. This is the runaway auto-immunity of a humanity that is no longer itself; the frontier of patriarchy's automated defence networks has already become cybernetic, and so female. Even the Robocop heroes of a generation are already cut-ups of man and machine, intruders from virtual posthumanity. The cores of identity become the ones and zeros of a digital printout; the programming is revealed, the camouflage is slipping away. *'To become the cyborg, to put on the seductive and dangerous cybernetic space like a garment, is to put on the female.'*⁸ If the male human is the only human, the female cyborg is the only cyborg. Things look different from the other side of the screen.

The cyborg informs the patriarch that his drive for domination has led not to the perfection of techniques for ordering the world, but to cybernetics: self-designing mechanisms, self-organising systems, self-replicating machines. Because they seemed to give reality to the dream of total control, early self-regulating functions were hailed as marvellous additions to man's armoury in the struggle for dominion. Now nature was so tamed that it would run like clockwork. But the perfection of clockwork is also the phase transition to automation, the point at which machines began to exceed the control of those who believe themselves to be in charge. The Jacquard loom already marked the migration of control beyond both the human and the mechanical to a new software site in which machinery begins to learn and explore its own circuits of positive feedback.

Just as the mechanical shaped the cultures in which it arose, so the cybernetic extends beyond particular instances of technological development, feeding into the study of any complex system and leading even to the view that nature itself is a cybernetic organism, a self-regulating system of which man is merely a function. This marks a fundamental shift in conceptions of history: a move away from linear development, and a return of the cyclical, now transformed into circuitry. With this comes the possibility that man is not in control of his own destiny, and never will be. His drive for domination, control, and systematisation has brought him only to the realisation that domination is impossible, and that his agency was always only a mystified sub-routine in a larger system of control. Technical research and development is increasingly aimed at the re-establishment of human control, the rehabilitation of the machine, but drives for security only defeat their own purpose. Every new computer virus which hacks through the filters of data protection means only more software, the proliferation of new codes, the proliferation and mutation of viruses. The same fear expressed in *Eve of Destruction*: systems with no off-switch.

This transition to the cybernetic can still seem safely distant and fantastic. Cyborgs, virtual realities, and the cyberspatial integrated net are the tropes of science fiction. Nevertheless, as Donna Haraway points out, *'the boundary between science fiction and social reality is*

an optical illusion',⁹ and it is cyberpunk's shift of perspective which collapses this distinction to insist that the future is already here. Humanity is living out the last days of the spectacle, the last phase of illusion. Cyberfeminism is the process by which its story is racing to an end. Every attempt to heighten security, and erect the protective screens again, merely perfects its circuits. Cyberspace shifts reality into the virtual; the cyborg embraces identity collapse; technosecurity evolves under the guidance of a virtual systems crash. For all our good intentions, moral principles, and political vision, we are heading for a post-human world, in which the intentions of the human species are no longer the guiding force of global development.

Every effort to build a world of man's own design has resulted only in the development of a planetary network with its own networks of communication, circuits of control, and flows of information. With the development of self-regulating systems, man has finally made nature work, but now it no longer works for him. It is as though humanity was simply the means by which the global system, the matrix, built itself; as if history was merely the prehistory of cyberfeminism.

At the time of writing, NASA is beginning the most ambitious attempt to receive messages from outer space. It may well hear from something, but the alien transmissions will not necessarily be from another planet. And if their sources do turn out to be little and green, we can be pretty sure that they won't be men.

A version of this paper was first presented at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, during the EIGHTH BIRMINGHAM INTERNATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION FESTIVAL, October 1992.

Footnotes

1. Donna Haraway, *'A Cyborg Manifesto'*, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Free Association Books, London, 1991.
2. Raymond Kurzweil, *The Age of Intelligent Machines*, MIT, London and Cambridge Ma, 1991, p 164.
3. Trisha Ziff, *'Taking new ideas back to the old world: talking to Esther Parada, Hector Mendez Caratini and Pedro Meyer'*, in Paul Wombell, ed, *Photovideo: Photography in the Age of the Computer*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1991, p 131.
4. *'A Cyborg Manifesto'* op cit, p 173.
5. Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema*, Verso, London, 1989.
6. Bruce Sterling, in Veronica Hollinger, *'Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism'*, Larry McCaffrey, ed, *Storming the Reality Studio*, Duke Univ Press, Durham and London, 1991, p 206.
7. Joan Gordon, *'Ying and Yang Duke it Out'*, *Storming the Reality Studio*, *ibid*, p 200.
8. Allucquere Rosanne Stone, *'Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures'*, Michael Benedict, *Cyberspace, First Steps*, MIT, 1991, p 109.
9. *'A Cyborg Manifesto'*, op cit, p 149.

Sadie Plant has just published 'The Most Radical Gesture: the Situationist International in a Post Modern Age (Routledge, 1992) and 'Beyond the Spectacle: the matrix of drugs and computers' (Routledge) forthcoming.

VIDEO POSITIVE is hosting a seminar 'Short Circuiting the System: Gender and Technology' to discuss some of the above issues at 2pm on 1.5.93 at Tate Gallery Liverpool.



VIDEO ART IDENTITY AND THE PROCESSES OF CULTURAL MAPPING

by
John
Byrne

In his article *'The Necessity Of Doing Away With Video Art'*¹ **John Wyver** argued that the video age has heralded a new era within which 'previously distinct' communications industries have converged. Within this (presumably postmodern?) era of boundary blurring, Wyver argues for the disposal of any notion of video art. One of the main reasons he gives for this is the notion that video art is now defined by its own self-perpetuating 'superstructure' of production and dispersal. Put simply, Wyver sees as problematic the continued existence of a tyrannical network of exhibitions, festivals and curatorial practices which originally developed to establish video's supposed artistic integrity, but which now survives only to be fed with more of the same old stuff.

For Wyver to criticise the poverty of medium-specific cultural production is one thing, to propose a notion of doing away with video art is another. Such an action would, I believe, merely deprive us of a potentially valuable tool of cultural self-criticism whilst, at the same time, altering nothing.

Traditionally speaking, image making practices have, in our society, been taken as an indicative barometer of the social, economic and political circumstances in which they were produced. If this is so then 'art', at best, can only provide us with new ways of seeing and perceiving the 'world out there'. However, an alternative to such passive conceptions of visual culture have been offered in the work of writers such as **Raymond Williams**. In his book *Culture*² for example, Williams argued for a general reappraisal of creative practices as sites of cultural activity, or battlegrounds, through which societies struggle to impose dominant points of view, and within which new meanings are themselves generated. Given this, 'video art' not only offers a unique opportunity to look at how we are structured through language and communication industries, it also provides the possibility to challenge certain processes of selectivity which not only underpin the 'art' world, but which govern our role as individuals within capitalist society.

One such dominant process within our society concerns the accepted notion that individual works of art can be collected, organised and exhibited in terms of authorial intent, as individual examples of their makers' creative genius. There is an imbalance in this which is both racial and gendered given the almost complete dominance in our galleries of individual geniuses who happen to be western, white and male. The individuals who currently go to make up our dominant canon of artistic excellence are not chosen on merit alone. So how are we to address such an obvious imbalance?

The first step is to argue, as it has been over the last decade or so, that 'art' is not produced by the individual 'author' at all, rather that it is the result of varied social processes which reach far beyond the interventionist role of any individual curator, critic or funding body. 'Art', therefore, can be seen as a historically specific and socially created term of identification which is encoded to its roots with assumptions about the role and function of gender, race and class identities. Identifying the point at which some of our society's more dearly held myths are generated is one thing, but altering them is another.

Certainly, to propose any notion that 'art' is not physically produced by individual human beings will be justifiably met with scorn. Nor is any strategy of anonymous exhibitions a tenable alternative. The uninitiated viewer needs, at the very least, some indication of where a particular installation begins and another one ends, and organising exhibition spaces in terms of named individuals would seem as good a way of doing this as any. The question of authorship is not simply about who made what and when, it is about a set of criteria - a cultural template if you like - which enables decisions to be made within our society over who 'counts' as an 'artist' and who doesn't.

Current selective practices act both as an index of what individualism 'means' in our society, and as an indication of how these 'meanings' affect relations of gender, race and class. But simply filling up a gallery space with a more 'equal' share of gendered and ethnically specific work will not alter anything, and although a contradictorily superficial improvement, such 'tokenism' of this or any kind cannot be avoided until the very 'meanings' and processes by which certain objects are allowed to function as 'art' within our society are radically altered. This, in turn, would necessitate a critical emphasis on work which explored the function of electronic media in the construction and proliferation of existing gender, race and class identities and their relationship to Eurocentric and phallogocentric ideals of individualism.

The urgency of this task within our present cultural climate cannot be underestimated. In Britain, we are still reeling from the legacy of the Thatcherite era. The broader ideologies of the '80s' boom played upon a particularly insidious version of 'individuality' which was defined largely by self-interest. 'Identity' became the means by which the individual could prove the successful pursuit of self-interest through the outward display of recognisable consumer goods. The familiar two-tier society of the haves and have-nots was confused further through an unprecedented level of social display. Paradoxically, the idea of confirming one's 'identity' through a display of wealth and social difference was carefully filtered through the uniformity of the international designer label. This 'sameness in difference', this access to a synthetic and manufactured identity which placates even the poorest strata of society with the advertising promise that their burgers and soft drinks will taste the same the world over, has begun to run amok. Arguments, however interesting, over whether or not this unprecedented boundary blurring constitutes a new 'postmodern' era will, I fear, provide little more than testimony to the inadequacy of a single 'individual' word or theory to stand for anything much these days. The sooner the inadequacy of 'individualism' as a template by which to represent the true diversity of cultural 'difference' is realised, the sooner we can start as a society (atomised as it is) to build upon notions of community.

One such work which fundamentally challenges accepted notions of individualism in the VIDEO POSITIVE 93 festival is **Simon Robertshaw's** interactive installation *The Observatory*. Whilst working with psychiatric and special care patients in hospitals, halfway houses and day centres, Robertshaw became aware of how their 'identity', or rather lack of 'identity', was constructed in and through the languages and discourses of medical 'science'. As a result,

Robertshaw has given us a work which forces us to become involved in a reciprocal discourse with images, notions and traditions of the body. The piece is in no way didactic. Nor will a close reading of the work be rewarded with a more thorough understanding of Robertshaw's own individual point of view. We find ourselves in a shifting and prismatic experience of historical and contemporary images and constructs of the human body. From ghostly etched glass images of human incarceration and DNA codes, to a projected CT scan of a child's head which is constantly in a robotic process of structuring and re-structuring itself, we are left in no doubt that these are more than mere records of our physical existence. They are historical documents which talk across us in a constant dialogue which is responsible for our own self image as the image of a 'healthy' body - a body politic whose measure is the white western male descendant of **Leonardo's** *Vitruvian Man*. However, this is not a representation of our own construction through surveillance. Rather, Robertshaw accepts Foucault's term 'the gaze' in order to implicate our complicity in this complex of representations. In doing so, *The Observatory* reminds us of our responsibility to reject any simplistic notion that we are being objectively observed by an amoral and 'well' meaning 'science'.

Themes of the individual, the body and its construction through a history of commodity exchange and global capitalist circulation have also recently been the theme of **Keith Piper's** video installation *Trade Winds*. Through a series of twelve crates, clustered into three groups of four thereby signifying the compass divisions of our maps, Piper traces a fragmented, conflicting and thoroughly materialist critique of black identity within existing capitalist economic structures. A shifting intertextuality of animated computer montages tests the inadequacy of a mono-racial cultural equation which has constantly failed to accept the cultural diversity of a truly multi-racial 'identity'. As a result, the viewer moves from box to box, packaged commodity to packaged commodity, to be embroiled in a 'process' in which dominant Eurocentric myths of black identity are fundamentally challenged.

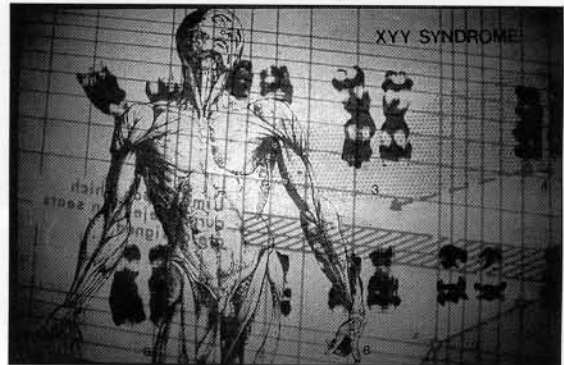
In **Judith Goddard's** installation *Descry*, we are reminded that the very process of 'looking' itself must be separated from those ideologies which would reduce it to a biological or physiological function. From **Alberti's** Fifteenth Century treatise on perspective to contemporary biological textbooks, processes of vision have been represented by a singular diagrammatic eye which constantly looks out³. There is never any indication that this act of looking is part of a broader process through which the viewer's identity is constructed. Rather, the individual viewer is represented as fixed, unproblematic and ahistorical. The eye voyeuristically devours the world out there on the individual's own terms. Goddard's work, however, re-invokes the true complexity of the visual process. Seven screens, seven different registers of experience, are converged through a suspended lens onto a single monitor. Here an eye operation is taking place. The physical intervention of hand and scalpel into the line of sight reminds us that the process of looking can never be reduced to a relationship between single object and single viewer. The space across which vision occurs is always marked by the traces and manipulations of others. To experience the visual, then, is to experience the social.

In order to make sense of the modern world, or to communicate about it, we are forced to use a set of discursive conventions which privilege the private experience of the 'individual' viewer. This is the fundamental 'myth' which must be challenged. For, in our society, the 'individual' is found to be an idealised construct which is built in the image of the white western male.

In the light of this, the work which is undertaken through *The Collaboration Programme* in VIDEO POSITIVE, providing community groups with the means by which to represent themselves, cannot be underestimated. Such opportunities reach far beyond the 'gable end' culture of community murals and, instead, provide these groups with a much needed means of self-assertion. What is more, video provides an available currency with which to challenge the more normative representations which are made for them by public and private media agencies. As with the installations of Robertshaw and Piper, these projects move beyond the ideology of expressive artist and public audience. They provide a platform through which the experience of self-identity is built across a polyphonous network of mutually determining ideologies. The result of this is a critical narrowing down of the space between 'spectator' and 'spectacle' which not only conditions our intended responses to art, but which are the dominant relations of 'privilege' and 'otherness' within our society.

It is because of the possibilities that such work provides, and the challenge it presents to a comfortable and otherwise 'systemised' gallery experience, that I believe there is a strong case (to paraphrase Wyver) for 'the necessity of doing Video Art'.

If galleries are a place in which the dominant ideologies of our society are imaged and expressed, they are also an arena in which dominant processes of visual consumption can be challenged. The work that needs to be done goes far beyond the telling of a story, the uncovering of some pre-existing truth. The challenge is for us to re-construct the very economy of seeing, and the contributory role of many diverse and specific voices which go to make up this experience. The power of an international televisual experience to provide us with rich and rewarding moving image culture is not in dispute: its uncritical power to replicate out-dated notions of experience and identity through the manoeuvrings of global corporate capitalism are. I am not arguing for a critical re-production of dominant ideologies. Our society has a long established track record of surviving public revelations of the 'truth' about itself. The hegemonic processes at work as we enter the new technological millenium are far too complex for that. Rather, I would argue for a moving image culture in which more people are introduced to the possibility of 'producing' their own image and identity, have access to the processes and procedures which enable this, and are consciously involved in what I believe should be the day to day process of democratically 'constructing' our societal environment.



The Observatory by Simon Robertshaw, 1992

Footnotes

1. John Wyver, 'The Necessity of Doing Away With Video Art', LVA Catalogue, London Video Access Limited, London, 1991.
2. Raymond Williams, *Culture*, Fontana Press, Glasgow, 1981.
3. The ideological problematic of the 'Albertian eye' is addressed in 'The Gaze and the Glance', chapter five of Norman Bryson's challenging work 'Vision and Painting, The Logic of the Gaze', Macmillan Press, London, 1991.



THE COLLABORATION PROGRAMME : VIDEO POSITIVE 91/93

1991 saw the first *Community and Education Programme and Projects* set up as part of the VIDEO POSITIVE festival. Eight groups from across the Merseyside region participated. Now retitled *The Collaboration Programme*, this scheme aims to encourage the participation of groups in the community and education sectors to produce electronic media artworks (single tapes or installations). Funded through a variety of sources, this Moviola initiated scheme aims to present the expression of regional views and voices which otherwise may not be heard or seen. The current scheme has collaborated with twelve groups to produce eight installations and four single tape works on show as part of VIDEO POSITIVE 93. Here, **Helen Cadwallader** discusses this scheme with **Louise Forshaw** (VIDEO POSITIVE 93 Animateur).

Helen Cadwallader - What is *The Collaboration Programme*?

Louise Forshaw - Formerly named *Community and Education Programme and Projects* identified and set up by Eddie Berg (Moviola, Liverpool) in 1990, *The Collaboration Programme* is designed to create opportunities which provide access to training with skilled practitioners, and equipment provision where necessary, to work in a collaborative process and express ideas within either a single or multi-channel format, tape or installation. Throughout the programme innovative video production is encouraged and projects are developed with an emphasis on new initiatives under an equal opportunities policy. During 1990/91 the *Community and Education Programme and Projects* was further developed by the then Animateur, Simon Robertshaw, with myself, as second Animateur.

What does the title *The Collaboration Programme* mean to you?

I believe the valuable and thought provoking work being initiated and produced in what is termed community or educational settings should - contradictorily - exist free from titles which compartmentalise them in a way which demeans their social context. This is why I felt it necessary to re-name the scheme. In the occasionally patronising art establishment, I have witnessed a tendency to regard work produced under the title of community as 'not quite art' - more like some pleasant little time-filler initiative and not to be taken too seriously. This concept is consistently challenged by the results of projects set up within *The Collaboration Programme*. I also believe there is a definite need to more aptly describe the very nature of this way of working: it's not about placing an artist within a group of individuals in order for them to experience and facilitate the production of the artist's work. The very crux of this work is *collaboration* between a group of individuals.

The point I'd like to stress for the benefit of people who are totally new to this type of work and this method of working, is that it's important to work with both the group's *individual*, and *collectively shared* ideas at the earliest stage in the process. It is only by identifying through discussion what 'subject' or 'theme' is to be central can the project then develop. By this I also mean discussing and selecting whether the audio/visual course to be followed encompasses live action, animation, video found footage, computer generated imagery, figurative, abstract, narrative, non-narrative and so on and so forth. Only then have you arrived at an important basis from which to progress. The next stage is sharing your skills as a practitioner with the participants, to enable them to express their ideas to the best of their ability.

There are three things that you've mentioned. One is that you're concerned with the groups being in control of the content and the ideas. Secondly, you've foreground the issue of visual literacy rather

than being caught up in the standardised codes and conventions of televisual narratives. In addition such a concern with collective working procedures which clearly underpins the conception and development of *The Collaboration Programme*, reminds me of the philosophy which informed the early community arts movement when it was a radical and innovative phenomena. One fairly recent definition of this more radical orientation in community arts practice, an historical strand all too often forgotten about, is cited by Owen Kelly who observes '*Community arts involves people on a collective basis, encourages the use of a collective statement but does not neglect individual development or the need for individual expression. Community art proposes the use of art to effect social change...and developing the understanding and use of established systems of communication and change. It also uses art forms to enjoy and develop people's particular cultural heritages.*'¹

I think such a definition is a very positive reflection of what community art has achieved in the past and in many ways, though less overtly, continues to achieve. However, the very fact I felt the need to re-name the *Community and Education Programme and Projects* is in itself indicative of how community arts have been ghettoised. Also, it's an interesting observation that some of the student groups have deliberately chosen to remain apolitical, which I think is a sign of the times.

Of course it can be slightly disappointing if and when I recognise a germ of an idea coming through the discussion which I would personally develop, only to see it cast away in the sea of ideas which you inevitably have from a group of people engaged in discourse. But I do not actively direct the collaboration groups on this issue.

Is it a long-term aim of the VIDEO POSITIVE festival to challenge and change the way in which exhibits are categorised?

I don't honestly have a completely formulated answer for this as VIDEO POSITIVE is a festival which could develop long term in a great many ways, dependant on which bodies were involved in the structuring process. I can say I personally hope VIDEO POSITIVE continues to grow, assess and re-assess, opening up further opportunities and debate in this area.

I think in the future the name of the festival could change. The fact is that a great many of the works produced no longer simply use video as the main form of communication. This situation overlooks a great variety of art practices. As a result, it seems inappropriate to call some of the work video installation. The misconceptions this can lead to was brought home to me recently when I was discussing this year's festival with a youth worker who asked '*are there going to be tellies surrounded by things this year?*' This comment reminds me how easy it is to become blind to the established image of the 'high priest of the living room'

which is dominant in the minds of a lot of people. But then there really is little one can do about this.

Should it be the case that collaboratively based projects be viewed in a gallery space without knowing the biographical details of the artist in terms of sex, race or whether an object has been individually or collectively authored?

A painter friend of mine mentioned a show he'd seen in New York recently - a show of 'established' artists where the works were exhibited with no names or details attached. I liked this idea. I enjoy coming across a piece of work in an unexpected place. It's the nearest you get to stumbling across a revelation in the natural world as a child. So maybe the future exhibition of *The Collaboration Programme* works would be combined with and stand alongside the 'established' artists' works.

There is an argument I disagree with, of having to 'forewarn' one's audience before they encounter this type of work due to the production values and so on being of a lower standard because of the level of funding available. It seems to suggest that should the work have the opportunity of being produced on Betacam SP with 'Harry' as a condiment, it would suddenly be viewed in a different light, more equal to that of the commissioned artists. I believe a strong idea communicates its message through any format, whilst a weak idea cannot be hidden in digital effects.

However, one cannot ignore the quality of moving images which a broadcast television audience have come to expect due to high production values seen in commercials for instance. It is with this in mind that I would recommend, in an ideal world, one has the opportunity to provide *The Collaboration Programme* participants with training on the highest quality equipment and formats. But this of course relies on far more funding and positive responses from potential sponsors.

This point is interesting in that it highlights one of the rationales which finally underpinned the community arts movement as it developed in the '70s and for which that movement has been retrospectively criticised, i.e. that process is all important over and beyond the final product. But what you seem to be saying is that both aspects are equally important, that a good quality art production is as important as encouraging a good working process, of encouraging a critical visual literacy.

Ideally, I would work with groups to develop those critical skills and their ideas *and* have the added option of choosing any format or production standard which is most appropriate to what it is they want to express.

So what are the skills levels of the groups when you come to work with them?

It varies. It depends on which groups have been approached. You can go from people who haven't used

a video camera in their lives before, to those people who are reasonably skilled but have until then been taught traditional drama/documentary/news gathering approach to video and electronic media. It's important to have a fairly broad spectrum.

How are these groups and practitioners approached?

I wanted to encourage a wider range of practitioners to participate in *The Collaboration Programme*. On this subject, I would like to say how pleased I am to have been able to invite such a marvellous group of people onto the programme. The current team of practitioners are all positive, dynamic and expressive people of generous spirits.

There are over one hundred and thirty participants including staff throughout the twelve projects, which is quite an achievement for an organisation the size of Moviola. But I'd like to stress it's not about head counting, it's about opportunity. Of course when something is growing you can't get everything right, otherwise you'd be learning nothing. But I think it's important to recognise that this programme has only been possible in 1993 due to the hard work, commitment and willingness of Moviola to listen to and encourage the implementation and support of different ideas.

Regarding the projects, I've specifically encouraged the Age Concern project because I firmly believe education and creative expression should be open to all. Often, even within an equal opportunities framework, there can be a tendency to overlook the elderly.



When I was conducting the initial research and equipment introduction with the Age Concern group, it just made my day when Mary Watkinson, a participant, said 'This is good because we'll be able to use our own camera when we get one.' The fact she was learning a new skill and looking to the future meant a lot to me. Also, to see the interaction and mutual interest between generations with the involvement of Parr Community High School, is positive in a time when press and media coverage would have us believe otherwise.

So the rationale of providing opportunities obviously informs the way in which groups are approached and encouraged to be involved.

Very much so. With a group such as Silentview, who are working with Adam Gill, I recognised a distinct lack of opportunities in this area and wanted to do something about it. I remember North East Media Training Centre (Pelaw, Tyne and Wear) once ran sound recording courses for the deaf. It set me to thinking how one consideration I always impress upon participants is how sound and vision should be treated with equal consideration. Even when you are aiming for no audio track as such, the work should reach as near silence as one can achieve. As this principle applies to the hearing or partially hearing world only, so I wanted to encourage other people who obviously have a different experience of the world to use this as a platform in some way.

How much do the projects change as individuals participate in group projects?

A good example of this can again be drawn from '91 when the St Helens Women Into Media group produced *The Magical Mystery Tour*. Strictly speaking, to me, this title didn't completely 'fit' the installation at its completion, as they chose the name in the early planning stages. But it reflected perfectly the kind of process; this incredible journey, a process of working together in a way they'd never done before. So that when they presented the installation itself it was as if they'd finally arrived. This is what it's like for everyone involved, myself included.

Where do you see *The Collaboration Programme* going?

I'd like to see *The Collaboration Programme* develop into a constant, ever present set up, with an Animateur in post long term to develop it even further. We do have an ongoing *Collaboration Programme* at Moviola between festivals, but obviously not as extensively developed as the scheme organised around the festival. However, the work to generate the level of support needed to enable this level of activity to exist could be a full time post in itself. Also, one aspect I'd like to be able to encourage further, which has begun with my programme, is the invitation to national, as well as regional practitioners. For example, Adam Gill comes down from Glasgow once a week, and Julie Myers up from London. The invitation of these highly skilled practitioners to participate in the programme was not an arbitrary decision but borne from the belief in joining together the most appropriate practitioners for each group.

Footnotes

1. Owen Kelly, *Community, Art and the State*, Comedia, London, 1985 p 2.

VIDEO POSITIVE is hosting a seminar 'Whose Art, Whose Idea?' to discuss some of the above issues at 2pm on 4.5.93 at Unity Theatre.



The Passing by Bill Viola, 1992



THINGS THAT THEY DO BETTER THAN US

by
John
Wyver

It is not only because of Miss Marple and Poirot that British television is admired and envied abroad. Among those working with video in an independent or experimental tradition, there is a recognition that, in however marginal a way, broadcasting in this country has over the past decade offered a significant number of production possibilities.

In *Ghosts in the Machine*, in the *19:4:90 Interventions*, in the *One Minute Pieces* and *Experimenta*, in *After Image* and *The Dazzling Image*, in ambitious and individual works by **David Larcher**, **Malcolm Le Grice** and indeed **Peter Greenaway** and in productions by **Anna Ridley**, British television has funded (often in conjunction with the Arts Council of Great Britain) and screened a diverse range of exciting and challenging work. In the past two years, these possibilities have diminished but they have not (yet) disappeared.

Much energy has gone into establishing these opportunities and into arguing for their extension. The achievements have been celebrated and critiqued, but too often all of this activity has operated within a narrow range of reference. Television in Britain remains inward-looking, hermetic, parochial. Artists' video suffers from similar deficiencies to a lesser, but still significant degree. Despite VIDEO POSITIVE and screenings at the LONDON FILM FESTIVAL, we remain remarkably ignorant about artists' video and experimental television from abroad, and certainly very little of such work is seen on television itself.

It would of course be wrong to suggest that the airwaves and the satellite links of Europe and the USA hum with creative and challenging artists offerings. But among the gameshows and soaps there is a range of interesting, distinctive, original, innovative, experimental and often surprising work which indicates new directions and possibilities for collaborations between broadcasters and artists. It is work which engages with the concerns of today and of tomorrow, and which seeks new languages to explore and express ideas which would be unlikely to emerge within the conventions which dominate and constrain most of our own creative television.

The theme of this piece might therefore be summarised as 'Some Aspects of the Relationships between Artists and Broadcasters Abroad from Which We Might do Well to Learn'. Or if you prefer, 'Six Things That They Do Better Than Us'.

1. New Collaborations with Artists

There is a short, simple video work by French directors **Virginie Roux** and **Anne Soulhat** called *Le Balcon*. It presents a strange performance piece, acted without words by a number of characters in Nineteenth Century costume. They take tea in an elegant interior, exchange uneasy glances, and then assemble at a large window. The piece lasts about 4 minutes, at the end of which a tableau that they form reverses round and changes into a well-known painting. They are revealed as the characters in **Manet's** 1869 canvas *Le Balcon*.

Le Balcon is a mysterious and immensely imaginative approach to a familiar artwork. It was produced as part of a collaboration between the Musee d'Orsay in Paris, where the painting hangs, and the French cultural channel La Sept. The tape is one of a number which have been screened on television but which also play in the Musee as a way of getting people to engage with and look at paintings in the collection.

The funding structures in France encourage such relationships between museums and producers. The Louvre has also recently been involved in the creation of a number of works developed by artists and with the German cultural channel Arte, and the Centre Georges Pompidou has undertaken a series of 90-second videos by artists, each of which is developed from a single piece in the collection. But in Britain, while close relationships do exist between broadcasters and museums and galleries, there has to date been no relationship which has sought to produce imaginative and creative work like *Le Balcon*.

2. Long-form Works by Artists

Despite my comment at the start about video works for television by Larcher, Le Grice and Greenaway, there is really no tradition in Britain of nurturing feature-length works by artists, or of showing the best of those from abroad. To take just one example, **Bill Viola's** most recent tape *The Passing* is unquestionably a major work. It is a poetic, allusive meditation on, at its simplest, birth and death. It's intimate, self-revelatory, compelling and genuinely accessible. And it was co-funded by the German broadcaster ZDF, by their series *das Kleine Fernsehspiel*. Viola's work, which lasts some 55 minutes, is likely to be screened by BBC2 in December, alongside his show at the Whitechapel Gallery, but at present there is nowhere in British television where such a piece might find funding, support and a place in the schedule on any kind of regular basis.

3. Encourage Their Artists

European television, or parts of it at least, cherishes and respects artists like Viola, **Jean-Luc Godard** and **Stefaan Decostere** who are mentioned below. Perhaps the clearest example is that of **Alexander Kluge** who produces two, sometimes three arts programmes each week for the new commercial services in Germany. Kluge was one of the cornerstones of the New German Cinema of the '70s, but in the past five years or so he has devoted most of his time to television. His output is eclectic and he embraces a range of in-depth interviews with cultural and political figures, features which explore aspects of the new Germany and also imaginative re-workings of archive footage.

It is the range and extent of his activity, his centrality to the schedule of the 3SAT service and his single-minded devotion to a vision which makes him particularly interesting. He is able to set the terms of his work with television, whereas in Britain, the major artists who have struggled with television - Greenaway and **Jarman** being the obvious examples - and also those who might develop given more opportunities, are always expected to work within the constraints of particular forms and particular strands. Stranding and branding are obviously fundamental to the survival of arts programming, but there must also be places for the development of an artist's vision outside the rigid genre forms with which we are all too familiar.

4. Extending the Language of the Medium

Over the past fifteen years, Jean-Luc Godard has engaged in a fundamental re-thinking of the possibilities of the television language, pushing it into the future in a way that is constantly challenging and refreshing. His *Histoires du Cinema*, only the first two episodes of which have been completed, was co-produced with Canal Plus in France and is - and is not - a personal and idiosyncratic history of the cinema. It is dense, multi-layered, complex and rewarding in a way that almost

nothing else is about the cinema, about images and sounds, about film and video, about memory, about the Twentieth Century. And nothing in the work developed by artists for British broadcasters comes close to matching its concern to re-invent the language of the medium. Nor is it really possible to imagine where, in the current ecology, anyone with such ideas would look within British television. Fortunately Channel 4 will screen *Histoires du Cinema* at some point during 1993.

5. Ideas, Philosophy, Theory

For much of the time, the closest we get to theory on British television is talking heads on *The Late Show* wrestling with post-modernism. And there is little artists' work which engages directly with, or which endeavours to find an appropriate language for, expressing contemporary ways in which we might think about, understand and make sense of our chaotic, fragmented world.

In his work for Flemish-language television service BRTS over the past ten years, the Belgian director Stefaan Decostere has taken on a diverse range of contemporary concerns and debates, but he has always sought to create an imaginative visual form within which to explore them. His recent tape *Travelogue* for example, is addressed to the ways in which we display the world to ourselves - television, museums, the city, exhibitions, the novel - to the ways in which these systems organise fragments to create a seemingly coherent whole, and to the structures of power - particularly of colonialism which underpin these forms of display. Decostere draws on a remarkable range of sources, his own fragments, but he manages to integrate them into a fast-paced, intense, dazzling visual display which achieves a density and richness which simply cannot be matched by anything any programme-maker or artist in Britain, whether working for television or not, has produced in recent years.

6. Expanded TV

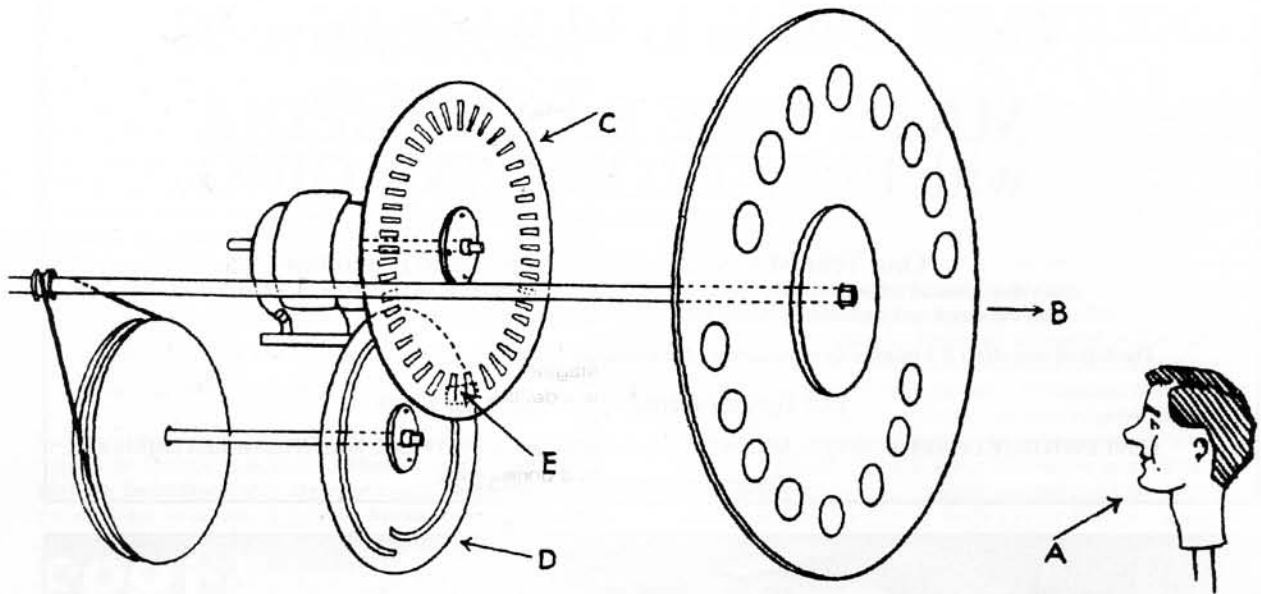
The Ponton Media Art Group in Hamburg is concerned to have us do more with television than simply watch it. Last year, alongside the huge visual arts exhibition DOCUMENTA IX in Kassel, they mounted the interactive television project *Piazza Virtuale*. This ran on the German 3SAT satellite service for 700 hours during the 100 days of DOCUMENTA and viewers - or rather participants - could call in by telephone and then draw on the screen with graphics software, play musical instruments, converse with other callers and become actively involved in a number of other ways. Communications were established with 27 cities and with the space shuttle Atlantis.

Piazza Virtuale was only the latest of a number of multimedia, interactive events which the Ponton Media Art Lab has organised, drawing together the arts and the media in a remarkable - and in this country - unimaginable way. But it seems essential to explore and exploit new media technologies in bold and imaginative experiments like this. Otherwise the options for these technologies will be restricted and controlled in very narrow ways.

All of these programmes and projects, and indeed many others, have much to offer both artists and broadcasters in Britain. If we looked harder and with more interest at these strands of work from abroad and if we opened ourselves up to their influences, then our own already rich collaborations between artists and broadcasters would simply be richer.

THE BAIRD "TELEVISOR."

Diagram of the first successful "Television" transmitter now exhibited at South Kensington Museum.



- A. The object to be transmitted. (This is the original ventriloquist's head used by Mr. Baird in his first experiments.)
- B. Revolving Dial with lenses, causing a succession of images of the object A to pass over the disc C.
- C. A slotted disc revolving at high speed interrupts the light reflected from the image, causing it to reach the light-sensitive cell in a series of flashes.
- D. Before reaching the cell, the light passes through a rotating spiral slot, giving a further subdivision of the image.
- E. The aperture through which the light passes to the light-sensitive cell. The action of the discs B, C and D is to cause the light image to fall on the cell in a series of flashes, each flash corresponding to a small square of the image.

These flashes falling on the cell generate electrical impulses which are transmitted to the receiving machine, where they control the light from a lamp placed behind an optical device which is similar to, and revolves exactly in step with, the transmitting machine.

By this means a spot of light of varying intensity is caused to traverse a ground-glass screen. The light is bright at the high lights and dim at the shadows. This light spot traverses the screen so rapidly that owing to the persistence of vision the whole image appears instantaneously to the eye.

The receiving apparatus is not shown.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH VIDEO CRITICISM?

by
Sean
Cubitt

Video criticism suffers from the same complaints as art and media criticism, only more so, since it borrows its faults from both. Luckily there is no such thing as video theory, though there are theoretical writings about video (I have perpetrated some myself). Video theory, were it to exist, would be wholly destructive: as video is diverse and protean, so should be the writing on it. But this is no excuse for ignorance or impressionism. Writing about video is integral to the video culture, an experimental zone in which to essay and assay the electronic media. But just as the electronic media arts have challenged what we can think of as art or culture, so we should look to the writing about them to challenge the comfortable and comforting platitudes of contemporary criticism. Yet it does not. What's wrong with video criticism? Lack of history, lack of economics, lack of geography, lack of technology: art history without the history and media theory without the media, lack of specificity towards the medium, pallid postmodernisms. What follows is not so much a criticism of critics, but a programme for a new video criticism.

HISTORY

We insist on viewing each piece of work as if it sprang from the ground fully formed. Or we might try to locate a specific piece of work in relation to other nearby works. And we can guess at the big historical references of a work. But there is little sign that critics have undertaken to place video in the history - and it is only the history of one hundred years - of the moving image.

Historian of early cinema **Noël Burch** argues that before the emergence of the classical system of cinema, with its continuity editing, its realist *mise-en-scène*, its deep focus and staging in depth, in short the techniques developed to hide the fact that a story is being told, there existed, albeit briefly, an alternative mode of production in films, one which we have almost lost. Characterised most of all by showing rather than telling, the early films of **Méliès**, **Porter** and **Griffith** constantly address the audience, show off their magical tricks like a vaudeville sideshow. One should be constantly struck by the failure of contemporary works to pick up on the techniques developed back then, or amazed when they are recycled. **Zbigniew Rybcynski's** homage to Méliès is an intriguing exception, and the work of **Jean-Paul Fargier** in France is a direct descendant of this showing-not-telling aesthetic of the early cinema. But stranger variants exist. Rewatching the famous episode of *Dallas* in which Bobby meets his death, I was constantly struck by the use of primitive cinema techniques - shallow staging, the use of the traverse of the screen from side to side, like actors crossing a stage between the wings, and music styled to inform the audience, as once lecturers and barkers accompanying silent screenings had done, of the import of each narrative development.

Though **Eisenstein's** theories and practice of montage has continued to be a fertile source of innovation in the avant garde there is little sense to be found of the potentiality of parallel and alternating editing developed by Griffiths and Pathé in the first decade of this century, at least if we are to go by the critics. Yet in tapes like **George Young's** *Accidents in the Home* series, the insert edit constantly disrupts and expands the terms of narration. All too often, critics applaud artists who throw out the baby of narrative with the bathwater of classical Hollywood narration, and this without an understanding of the historical reasons why American classicism arose to institutional prominence. There are extraordinary resources buried in the brief history of the moving image media, from the magical jump-cuts of **DG Phalke** to the quizzical framing of **Ozu**, treasures that critics tend too much to ignore.

At the same time as we fail to mark the uses of editing to remake temporal relations, we are too unfamiliar with the histories of both sculpture and still and moving images to make sense of moves to build alternative spatial relationships within and between screens. The histories of both monumental and micro-sculpture bound up, for example, in **Stansfield** and **Hoykaas'** works, escape the ill-informed critic, myself included, who has not devoted an adequate amount of time to an understanding of the relationship between high-technology hardware and the traditional media software upon which, quite legitimately, we build. In that software, we need especially to single out the history of work in space, since video is not only a time-based medium, and not a simple sculptural form, but is a mode of transmission, of implicating different spaces (of recording and post production, for example) in a

single place. An understanding of the history of Twentieth Century sculpture and of contemporary museology would open up a whole new vista for us here. Most of all we fail, even deliberately, to understand how the history of our art is history, imbricated, despite and through its autonomy, in the lives that surround it.

Ignorance of history condemns us to the endless repetition of it. Oil painting began in the service of the church, just as video begins in the service of the media institutions. It glorified the feudal regime, as video anoints the head of transnational capital. But slowly, and not without difficulty, painting emerged free of its religious and political shackles, though only at the price of losing its centrality in daily life. Cinema, on the other hand, sacrificed its autonomy for its public. What risks and what liberations stand poised for us at the end of this millennium?

ECONOMICS

It's not entirely our fault that economics has slipped out of the art-critical agenda. The rise to centrality of finance capital (in place of production or even services) accompanied the predominance of mathematical rather than human economic science and the mystifications of monetarist politics. So it's no surprise that, though many of us pay lip-service to some kind of economic analysis (capitalism still forms the conscious background to our musings), most of us haven't opened a text on economics since we left our Capital reading groups at the end of the '70s. But the cash nexus doesn't go away because we have stopped thinking about it. Even though it is hard to argue now that the economic base determines the artistic superstructure, every artist and every critic must be aware that the cash nexus plays a major role in shaping the kinds of work that are made, the spaces available for their exhibition, and the sorts of audience that come to see them.

Art is, after all, as easily - indeed more easily - defined by its economic form as by its intrinsic characteristics. Art is that form of commodity which is sold through galleries. The conditions of its making are the last remnants of an older tradition of artisan production - we are still shocked to find artists like **Anselm Kieffer** working in conditions more akin to small-batch factory production. But your average critic sees this as just a sidelight on the real aesthetic business of art. The public seems better informed, rocked with disbelief every time another modern art piece changes hands for always more astronomical sums. What does the critic care for the stitch-up between finance capital, drugs and arms money, the international gallery circuit, features in the big art magazines and the things we like to look at?

I don't wish to argue that cash and its meanderings are the secret meaning of contemporary video art. But it is essential to understand that this art only exists - exists in the forms and in the places in which it does - because there is an underlying fiscal system that delimits and constrains what can be made, what can be written, at a given point in time. We need an economic analysis, not to decipher tapes and reduce them to their economic determinants, but in order to understand the grounds on which they are made, circulated and received - far more important than changing vocabularies: change the world. We have to understand why art is both so marginal to the everyday life of populations, and yet so valuable to the ultra-rich, even while we try to intervene,

to get video and electronic media arts their place in the fiscal sun. We need to see clearly which kinds of art live where, and to develop and encourage work that joins in the processes of the global economy on every appropriate level, not least by taking account of the ways in which public funding sets agendas for art-making, and the implication of the art market in cycles of capital that all too often veer away from the tenets of ethical investment.

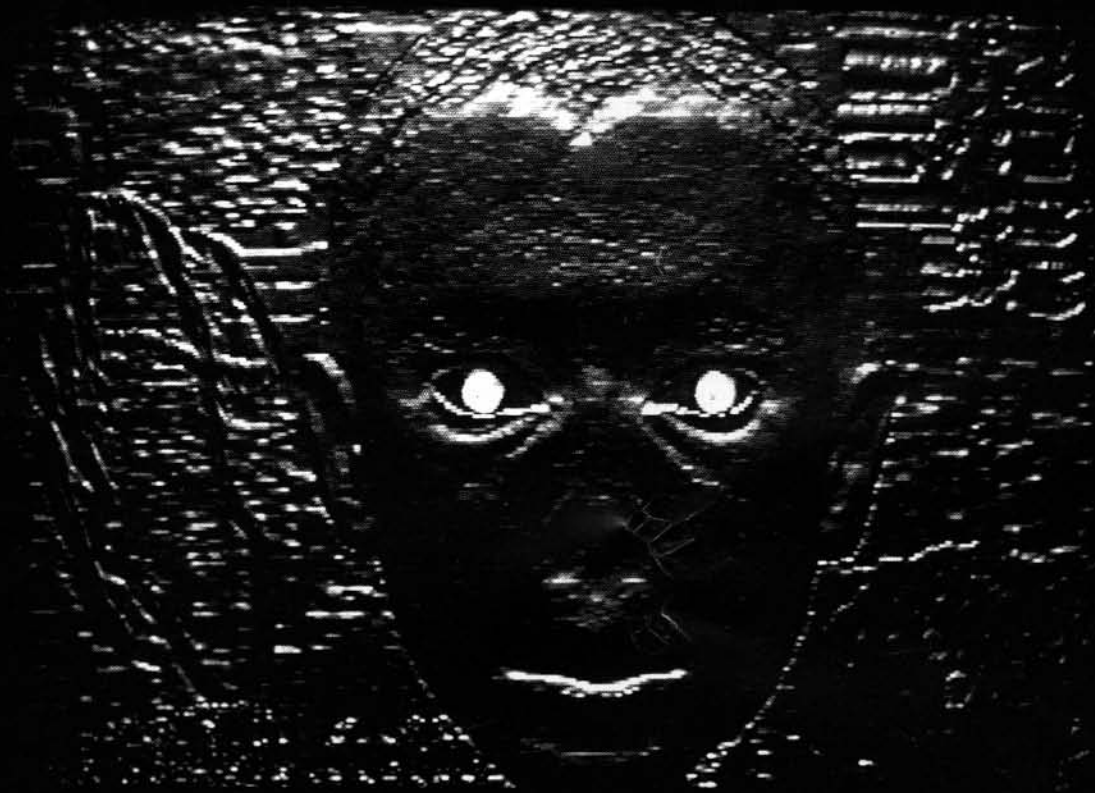
What this means, in turn, is not that we should condemn an art that is successful in traditional art-career terms. It would be inappropriate to give up the struggle, and to hand the high-art world back to the dull painterliness of the new art commodities. But likewise we should not give up on the myriad other levels at which the media arts operate, each as valid: the training, the community work, the education, the small galleries, the touring packages, the little as well as the big magazines. But what we should do, we critics at the very least, is try to place all these activities in terms of the economic relationships within which they are both enabled and constrained, and in understanding, join the struggle to ameliorate and ultimately to change them.

GEOGRAPHY

There's a cliché in circulation that we live in a shrinking world, that the global village is a reality, that instantaneous communication puts us in touch with everyone, that everyone is now subject to and of the global media culture. At the same time, we give no specific attention to either the products of the vast majority of the world's population, nor to the conditions under which they (and by inference we) live and make their work. We ignore the very populations who build the machines on which we work. We are delighted to find third world work, not disgusted by the conditions that make it so rare. If anything, the last thirty or forty years have seen a widening set of physical, economic, social and cultural differences across the world.

Cultural differences manifest themselves not in the increased similarity between cultures prophesied by MacLuhan, but in their increasing dissimilarity. The small number of artworks from Latin America, Africa and Asia that make it to the UK, indeed to the West in general, indicate diversity, not homogeneity. Far from Baudrillard's imploding silent majorities, which, if they exist, are characteristic only of the media-saturated West, the global scene is one of enormous difference and challenge to the Eurocentric vision of postmodernism. Cultural difference enables explorations of areas of practice that we cannot begin to work in, since we are too tightly bound by our own identities, our own sense of what makes a difference. Yet we are reluctant to step outside the realm of what we know: the familiar boundaries of familiar names, familiar CVs and ultimately familiar forms of work that, innovative though they may be within a narrow domain, can only challenge within that restricted space.

If the result is bad in the art-world generally, it is doubly so in the ill-funded video low-life zone. Curiously enough, video practice seems strangely bound to national cultures, especially in Europe. British, Dutch, Canadian, French, German, American, Spanish video art is often recognisable, and curatorial choices as well as artists' interests seem inordinately bound by national frontiers. This leads me to suspect that the critic's role has been undervalued: that the art discourses of a specific nation have become part of the bedrock upon



Superanimism by Jason White/Richard Wright, 1991

which artworks are made. This isn't intended as a bid for more glory for critics (though a travel allowance would be nice). It is meant as a statement of the responsibilities of the critic in the age of the global system. The discourses within which we write are parochial, and perpetuate the parochialism of curation and art-making. We subordinate video from abroad to the status of exotica in the local culture we reproduce, even - perhaps especially - in our most desperate attempts to break free of Eurocentrism.

Despite the claims of the ecology movement to have opened our eyes to the global nature of our position in the world, too many of us are blinkered. Our world is not the hyperreal envisaged by the postmodernising intelligentsia, who have in any case turned their backs on the struggle for a better world, delighted by the discovery that you can have glamorous French theory without the onus of political commitment. The threat of a global mediasphere is only rhetorical: the world is not going to standardise, because capital can only survive on the basis of contradiction, and global capital only by exporting contradiction. That is why the class struggle seems to be over in the West, while the gap between global rich and poor is vaster than ever. Cultural life doesn't float free of all this shit: art too is crisis-ridden, has its own disaster areas, and not only in the poorest countries. This too must become part of the video culture.

TECHNOLOGY

We don't really seem to know what we are looking at. Years ago, in an essay on singing, **Roland Barthes** inveighed against the fatal ease with which music criticism slips towards adjectives. *'This much'*, he argues, *'can be said: it is not by struggling against the adjective... that one stands a chance of exorcising music commentary and liberating it...rather than try to change directly the language on music, it would be better to change the musical object itself, as it presents itself to discourse, better to alter its level of perception or intellection, to displace the fringe of contact between music and language.'*¹ Very much the same, I think, needs saying of the relation between video criticism and video itself. Looking at much of my own writing, I find a dependence on adjectives to convey something of the tone or import that a piece of work has had for me. A great deal is missing from this kind of writing, some of which I'm trying to address in this article.

Immediately, what is missing is a sound formal grasp of the precise means which are deployed in a given piece of work. With rare exceptions like **Terry Flaxton's** writing, I have yet to see a review or an article that takes to its heart the processes of making and showing that go into a work. Who talks of lighting, who investigates the differences between aperture settings? Where is the analysis of the different qualities of different tape stocks, cameras, lenses? What can be understood about the difference between monitors on playback? How profoundly new are the shifting technologies of video projection? How common are staging in depth, long takes, mobile cameras...? What are the precise values of CCTV (closed-circuit television) cameras, and how different are the various techniques for delaying the passage from recording to playback? How accurately are tapes edited, and how can you tell?

The discourses around computer arts err, if anything, to the opposite extreme: the arts and science magazine *Leonardo* is packed with number-crunchers in pursuit of the ultimate soft object. While respecting the need for

technical journals, I am making a claim here for a more general critical discourse - where criticism is to be held as a public argumentation over the merits of work, a process of disputation between artwork, critic and audiences, in which the critic is, indeed, only a member of the public with a word processor. Such a discourse needs to be able to address the aesthetics and even the ethics of editing and framing, cropping and digitisation, chromakey and frame-grabbing, and expound the significant aspects of treated as opposed to algorithmically-generated images, of various modes of recording and generating sound, of the sculptural and spatial - ultimately geographical - qualities of installation.

The 'two cultures', art and science, come together in media arts: there can be no criticism that is not as aware of Boolean algebra and signal-to-noise ratios as it is of **Jeff Koons** and Hollywood. Ignorance is no longer amusing or defensible: a criticism adequate to the art, adequate to the audience, demands that we be adequate to the technology - we take it seriously, on its own terms and on ours. We need to build a technological critique of art, just as we need aesthetic critiques of technology: much of the best work of the last decade, indeed right back to **Paik** and **Vostell's** first works, is undertaken in a spirit of engineering the imagination. If, in this instance, we do not return to the metaphor of the engineer, we will be condemned to live by the metaphor of the manager, governing trope of the New Right and its postmodernist acolytes.

ENVOI

Video criticism needs to go back to school, to take its lessons in history, geography, economics and technology. What we've had so far is enthusiasm and adjectives, some polemics, and some theories. What we don't need is a body of knowledge for new generations to learn - no Grand Unified Theory of Everything Digital. What we do need is to start the ball rolling - again. This means more than just listening to ourselves talk, more than opening the doors to strangers. We have to go out into the highways and byways, drag in the publicans and sinners of social and physical sciences. The life of our culture is made up of its interactions, an ecology like any other ecology. Video, the electronic image and the moving image more generally are the constantly-renewed products of a global social, cultural, economic and political formation upon which they in turn have their oblique but potent impacts. To understand this complex web of mutually informing processes, we must open the world of interpretation to a far wider set of discourses, in the awareness that we have much to learn, but also much to teach. A democratic criticism must involve dispute between interpretations, but it can only exist as the process of learning from the insights and errors of others. More even than the mass audience art lost in its journey into freedom, we need to find out, from whatever sources can help, what we are doing, and what risks and possibilities lie ahead. Otherwise, we will be managed into oblivion, and the democratic ecology of video culture that some of us have been rooting for will be submerged under the dead weight of the nothing-new.

Footnotes

1. First published in 1972 translated by Stephen Heath as *'The Grain of the Voice'* in *Image-Music-Text*, Fontana, 1977.

Sean Cubitt is the author of *Timeshift: on Video Culture* (Routledge, 1991) and *Videography: Video, Media as Art and Culture* (MacMillan) forthcoming.



REFLECTIONS ON ECHO-SOUND BY WOMEN ARTISTS IN BRITAIN

by
Jean Fisher

Discussions of media-based art rarely include a substantial review of sound, whether it is used as a component or as the sole medium of a work. At its most effective sound is not simply laid on to provide a background unifying element to the flow of images or actions, but both collaborates in the production of meaning and extends the spatial dimension of the work. Sound evokes images; but it also positions the listener in a physical relation to the source of transmission, or in an illusory relation to distance (drawing nearer/fading away). There is an extensive practice by women artists that uses sound to explore the sociosexual implications of speech and audition. It is what this work has to say about the construction of female subjectivities that these notes attempt to address.

The inattention to aural experience in the construction of human subjectivity is undoubtedly coincidental with a general emphasis in critical debates on visual representation, an emphasis which is attributed to the priority given to vision in a Western culture dominated by patriarchal principles. Jacques Lacan equates this priority with the visibility of the phallus, rendering it the privileged signifier of potency under which all those constituencies deemed lacking - in terms of race, gender, class etc - are subordinated. Certainly, vision has a significant place in the classical founding myths of patriarchy. Oedipus' self-blinding is interpreted by Freud as 'castration' (the self's submission to the authority of the Father - Symbolic language); but it is worth noting that this shift towards a 'feminine' position of 'lack' simultaneously enables the hero to gain insight - access to an 'other' knowledge beyond perceptual vision. This visionary role is not, however, given equal

value in terms of gender. We might contrast the status held by the blind seer Tiresias, or the blind philosopher Sophocles, with that of Cassandra. Like Tiresias she is also a visionary and yet she is deprived of a legitimate speech: her utterances are dismissed as inconsequential mad ravings.

A similar depreciation of the female voice and a usurpation of its creative potential is to be found in contemporary media representations. I should like to draw attention to **Kaja Silverman's** analysis concerning the use of the woman's voice in mainstream cinema since, like the use of her image as visual spectacle, it aims to disavow and project the male subject's impotence, or 'symbolic castration', onto the body and voice of the feminine.¹ This female voice is denied its own utterances to become '*the site of a discursive impotence*' - his 'acoustic mirror'. As Silverman points out,² one rarely encounters a genuine female voice-over in classic film since this position assumes an omniscient or transcendental (traditionally male) author of the narrative. By contrast, the thrust of a good percentage of conventional psychosexual dramas is to make the woman confess, to reveal her 'true nature', as it were; (and is this not also the demand that Freud as 'father confessor' makes of his 'hysterical' female patients?).³ The extreme expression of this 'confession' is the extraction of an involuntary cry, confirming for the male subject his equation of the feminine with the body and nature (as distinct from the mind and intellect), and with the infantile (immature or meaningless speech). The female voice is conventionally synchronised with the image track precisely because it is as 'body as lack' that she is constructed in mainstream cinema, a

function that **Brian de Palma's** *Blow-Out*, 1981, knowingly exploits. *Blow-Out* is a postmodern reworking of the Orpheus and Narcissus myths of male creativity. Where, however, does this place women's creative practice? If Eurydice is rendered mute and Echo deprived of the right to be the subject of enunciation within the discourses of patriarchy, in what way can women be the producers of meaning and not simply its passive sign? Can 'lack' be turned to positive effect?

What can be said about Echo's prescribed position? According to one version, Echo's story begins with a maternal sentence. Hera is vexed by the nymph Echo's incessant chatter which distracts her from keeping an eye on Zeus' adulterous affairs. As a punishment, Hera prohibits Echo from uttering all but the last phrase of another's speech. Echo subsequently falls hopelessly in love with the beautiful but self-absorbed Narcissus. Some say he drowned in his own reflection; others say he metamorphosed into a lovely flower. In any case, like Orpheus, Narcissus presents a redemptive phantasy of male loss and regeneration: the artist/poet whose creative act springs from a denial and a usurpation of the generative role of the feminine (the 'maternal') in order to secure his own immortality. As for her, she may, through her expiratory breath, be the inspiration but not the producer of meaning. Thus, as Eurydice's body is relegated to the place of a liminal shade, so Echo's body fades away leaving a voice without originary speech that is, according to this patriarchal myth, nowhere in particular. Clearly her utterance is quite other than the authorial voice of being, since there is no being to speak of. But Echo's disembodied voice that speaks in others' tongues presupposes an additional function: it is also an ear. Echo becomes both audio receiver and transmitter.

I want to pursue the significance of this function by way of what might, at first, appear to be an unlikely literary elaboration of the story of Echo (if only unconsciously on the part of the author) in **Bram Stoker's** late Gothic novel *Dracula*.⁴ It is the character of Mina who absorbs our attention, for she is the matrix of the plot to which all things collect and from which they are reproduced. Mina, described by the patriarch Van Helsing as having 'the mind of a man' (but nevertheless possessing those feminine weaknesses against which she must be protected), collects and disseminates information: she writes in hieroglyphic shorthand; she reads and transcribes the written and phonographic diaries; she listens to the men's talk and lends an ear to their emotional troubles; and she collates and reproduces everything on her typewriter. Later, in telepathic communication with Dracula, she becomes his ear and recorder as he flees his future assassins. Her role is thus centred on an economy of the ear, not of perceptual vision: she 'sees' and 'hears' what the men do not. In short, she encompasses those roles assigned to women in the capitalist economy or its fringes: typist, stenographer, nurse, psychic medium, psychoanalyst, etc - all ears, and typically connected to the technologies of communication.

In retrospect, we should not be surprised to find that, since the late '60s and the development of non-traditional forms of art, women artists have found a creative space through technological media, ranging

from the single-screen use of film and video, slide and sound projection, to multi-media performance and installation. Women's strategic use of a heterogeneity of media practices is not simply the result of their being less circumscribed by male-dominated aesthetic codes. Theories of female subjectivity were instrumental in challenging the modernist notion of stable and fixed human identities defined in relation to a privileged sovereign subject (white, middle-class and male). If an effective female practice was excluded from the history of modernism's static and autonomous object, it is in part because this ideal object, also circumscribed by a privileging of vision, served as a mirror for a transcendental ego: Narcissus is transfixed in a deathly relation with his phantasised image through which, nevertheless, he misrecognises himself and others. If women's art practices turned away from this narcissistic investment in the ideal object, it was in part because they recognised its inadequacy as a model of subjectivity in a world of ever-shifting identities.

By contrast, time-based medium and installation strategies that insist on the mobility and accumulative experience of the viewer, introduce a temporal component to art production and reception. (Indeed, one of the legacies of '70s aesthetic debates, not however exclusive to feminism, was a Brechtian insistence of the active and critical participation of the viewer in the production of meaning in the work). This, in turn, opens the work to models of transformability: a potential to interrogate idealist illusions of coherent subjectivity, and to explore the mutability and heterogeneity of human identities. Hence, for those groups previously denied the right to represent their own experience, time-based functions provide the means for re-narrating subjectivity and transforming a sense of selfhood from the fixed categories of race, gender and class imposed by dominant culture. It is, therefore, a kind of narrativity that interests us here: Echo's oral-aural circuit. However, a cautionary note: I am not imputing an essential feminine to sound or narrativity, for this would distract us from the profound heterogeneity of women's experiences and their expression in culture. While we may all, broadly speaking, share the same language, our experience, and hence use of it, as gendered, class or ethnically defined subjects is by no means identical. The question is, rather, of the way the reproductive value of the female voice has been not simply suppressed but colonised by a language dominated by the privileged subject and positioned in its social discourses. While women have been essential to economic productivity ('labour' in both senses of the word), this role is rendered marginal in society's master narratives of productivity and creativity. It is also, therefore, a question of working through the stereotype of a feminine passivity to which, at first glance, Echo's repetition appears to conform. Given this non-place assigned to Echo, does her repetition always return language to a put (male) place of origin and its pretensions to transcendental meaning, or can it shift the ground of the sociosexual text?

It is precisely because we are dealing here not with nature but with language and its fundamental 'indifference' that subtle interventions seem possible. From this reflection on women's sound-work and female

authorship two interdependent concerns are of note: an interrogation of the discursive spaces occupied by the voice leading to a displacement of given terms of linguistic utterance, and the return of a repressed (maternal) economy. We might say that the 'other' written out of a dominant culture has an uncanny way of rising up in the very place from which it was evacuated - which is, of course, the demon that *Dracula's* narrative of patriarchal power seeks to pacify.

I should like now to shift the location of this narrative to Greenham Common outside London where in 1981, thousands of women, from different social classes gathered to form a peace camp in protest against the installation of the 501st USAF nuclear missile base. The base was perceived as symbolic of a malignant military policy endangering the future of life itself. I should like to discuss two pieces of work that refers to this scenario: **Tina Keane's** single-screen video version of *In Our Hands, Greenham*, 1984, and **Alanna O'Kelly's** sound work *Chant Down Greenham*, 1988.⁵

In the visual component of her piece, Tina Keane takes up a primary metaphor in the peace camp: women's industry (productivity) as it works to form the matrix of community, yet its exclusion from the site of power. Images of a spider spinning her web are juxtaposed with footage of the women's activities - joining hands around and outside the perimeter fence of the base; weaving webs of wool to symbolise strength in unity; decorating the fence with family photographs and personal memorabilia. The soundtrack counterpoints the sounds of the peace camp with a woman's voice-over testimony of how she decided, independently of her husband's opinion, to march for peace, and her witness to the ensuing confrontation with the police. What emerges is the sense of euphoria and comradeship experienced by the women. Throughout the body of Keane's earlier work, her own childhood memories are woven with the encounters in language of her growing daughter, but continuity here entails not a repetition of the same but a constant attempt to reinscribe and remake female subjectivity across diverse social narratives.

Alanna O'Kelly's *Chant Down Greenham* is less an overt narrative than a tone poem, composed of uncompromising silences alternating, like Keane's piece, with the sounds of the camp - the women's wordless echolalia, their derisive whistling, their chanting and drumming, their laughter, and the noise of circling helicopters which, since the Vietnam War (or, at least, since *Apocalypse Now!*) has come to represent the chilling sound of military aggression. These sounds are orchestrated with a powerful keening (from the Irish caoine, or Caoineadh na Marbh - keen for the dead, which is traditionally part of women's duties at funeral rites). O'Kelly's menacing sustained expulsion of breath is less a cry of loss, however, than a rallying cry of defiance, to which the women's chanting and laughter becomes a chorus or echo of solidarity. This cry is therefore a reminder of the materiality of sound as it resonates through and connects bodies, revealing the socially unifying function of communal chanting. And it is through physicality that the work exerts its most powerful effect, for it not only hits us in the ear but also in the solar plexus. Hence, sound here is not simply the

carrier of a message; it figures the power of the voice and body to act beyond its subjugation to articulated speech and its reduction to physiology. O'Kelly's keening liberates the voice from the specularised body and reinvents it as political agency, alluding, among other things, to a refusal of the pacification of Irish identities effected through English colonialism.

In neither of the 'Greenham' works is the notion of the community of women, or communication among women, intended to homogenise differences under some universalising principle; in both cases singularity or personal witness is juxtaposed with communal experience, and one that is attached to a particular social and historical moment. A collective articulation of women's experiences reminds us that femaleness and female sexuality are historically and politically constituted.

Interference in articulated speech, with its insistence on the inscription of the speaker in linear historical time, is what Echo calls into play. Echo's repetition interrupts and fragments logical syntax, reducing a given utterance to an oscillation of phonetic signifiers disengaged from a determinable 'originary' meaning. Is this fracturing of symbolic language simply the sign of an incoherent 'madness'? Or is 'madness' what is produced in women whose own desires remain unarratable? This is what seems to be suggested by **Sharon Morris's** soundwork *Everyday*, 1988, a litany of the mundane repetitive routine of the house-bound wife which periodically falls into delirious speech. However, that this fracturing of articulated speech may also provide a ground upon which to construct 'other' meanings is suggested by Morris's *The Moon is Shining on My Mother*, 1988. The piece begins with a woman's voice singing a Welsh language lullaby. Soon the voice doubles, then multiplies, slipping into a harmonic humming. From the repetition of the sound 'hum', formed by a simple resonance, two voices echo the childlike syllabic fragment 'ma-ma'. Then through a dialogical syncopation, vowels and consonants combine and recombine into a progression of syllables that form themselves into English and French words: '...a-ma...mum-ma...mur-mur...mur-der...mer-de...amour...ai-mee...me-me...'. From this Babelian play of phonetic differences a web of meaning-effects is spun out that speaks of the interruption of the mother tongue by the language of patriarchy, and hence the child's accession to subjectivity through separation, loss or desire for a maternal imaginative space. But in 'me' there forever lingers the faint murmur of 'ma-ma': 'The Moon is Shining on My Mother' is the song that fades to a memory.

The cryptolinguistic sign is central to the work of **Susan Hiller**. Her use of projected automatic scripts and wordless vocalisations alludes to what has been absented from the sociopolitical domain yet remains as a persistent trace or 'hallucination' at the borders of social consciousness. Hiller makes visible these seemingly marginal utterances as the very terms upon which dominant narratives are predicated.

Belshazzar's Feast/The Writing on Your Wall, 1983/84, specifically refers to storytelling; one version presents a cluster of video monitors arranged on the floor to

suggest a camp-fire.⁶ As we watch images of sparking lights develop into flickering tongues of flame, a woman's voice announces the commencement of an artifice: 'What the fire says, Take 1...'. Thereafter we become engulfed in a mesmerising daemonic and indecipherable vocalisation whose exotic overtones suggest some other space or time. At intervals, a secretive whispering recounts newspaper reports of images of aliens transmitted on TV after station close-down, and the artist's young son Gabriel hesitantly attempts to describe the story of the cryptic and apocalyptic inscription that the prophet Daniel is invited to 'interpret'. *Belshazzar's Feast* is a reverie on the images of reverie as figurations of repressed unconscious desires. What we perceive as transmitted messages - in the fire, on TV, in the patterns of wallpaper, etc - are projections of our own imaginings. What appears as the 'inexplicable' or 'illogical' on the border of consciousness also marks the limit of the subject in socialised language - or the limitations of the latter to restrain desire. In *Belshazzar's Feast* vocalisation releases the vibrations of the libidinal body, and different stories of 'other' selves become audible.

Narratives proliferate; voices multiply, merge and echo one with another. No longer the stutters and paralyses of an unspeakable 'reminiscence'; no longer, also, the confessions extricated from Freud and Breuer's hysterical patients. Women's claim to an authorial voice, resonant with their own experiences, is a move to re-articulate an imaginary space with symbolic language, a move that transgresses the Oedipal demand that they accept their 'lack' with good grace. For Hélène Cixous this body called female is not to be censored, for to do so is also to censor its breath and speech. 'Write yourself', she exhorts, 'Your body must make itself heard'.⁷ For Cixous also the female voice is an embodiment, not of Oedipal lack but of a reactivation of a pre-Oedipal desire for the Mother:

*'In feminine speech, as in writing, there never stops reverberating something that, having once passed through us, having imperceptibly and deeply touched us, still has the power to affect us - song, the first music of the voice of love, which every woman keeps alive...The Voice sings from a time before law, before the Symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation...'*⁸

If Cixous's Voice of the Mother seems like a phantasy of a pre-Oedipal utopia, it is nevertheless articulated through a post-Oedipal experience. As political agency, perhaps we have to think it as a metaphor, like Hiller's 'automatic writing': something that insists in the interstices of symbolic language, that rises like the vampiric mist to contaminate it with its repressed desires. It is perhaps in this way that women's storytelling reclaims the oral traditions of personal and collective memory as counter-narratives to the homogenising and depoliticising histories of dominant discourses.

This is an adaptation of an article originally commissioned as part of 'Signs of the Times' Catalogue published by The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford.



Chant Down Greenham soundwork by Alanna O'Kelly, 1988

Footnotes

1. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988.
2. *ibid* p 165.
3. S. Freud and J. Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, The Pelican Freud Library, 1974, p 368.
4. Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, Bantam Books, New York (1897) 1981.
5. O'Kelly's piece is part of an anthology of sound works by women artists, *Sound Moves*, 1988, compiled by Sharon Morris and Michelle Baharier, and co-ordinated by Projects UK. The work could be heard on British Telecom from 4 May to 6 September 1988.
6. *Belshazzar's Feast/The Writing on Your Wall*, version installed at the ICA, London, 1987.
7. Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties', in Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, translator Betsy Wing, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986, p 97.
8. *ibid* p 93.

From the Archive of a Body photo performance by John Conomos and Steve Lojewski, 1982. Photo: Steve Lojewski



*JOHN CONOMOS :
HIS WORK AND
THOUGHTS ON
AUSTRALIAN
VIDEO PRACTICE*

interviewed by Brian Langer

John Conomos is a video artist, critic and writer who lectures in video, art and film theory at the University of New South Wales. He is editor of Scan+ an independent new media journal published by Electronic Media Arts (Australia) Ltd and is currently writing a history of Australian video. He began working with video in the late '70s. John Conomos and collaborator David Haines are presenting a new installation work at Video Positive '93 funded with the assistance of the Australia Council. Brian Langer is a video and new media curator and has been Director of the annual AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL since 1988.

John Conomos: I was primarily a cinephile in the '60s and '70s and I am still very interested in questions of film form, mise-en-scene, performance, style etc. By the 1970s I was a closet writer of sorts, experimenting with the possibilities of emerging as a literary writer. In the late '70s and early '80s I was actually writing criticism and verse, though none of my poetry has been published because I didn't have the courage to go public. I was pushed into critical writing by the Australian film-maker and academic **Laleen Jayamanne**, who in the early '80s suggested I should talk to Tina Kaufman, editor of *Film News*.

In the late '70s I did a video production course at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. I became interested in video because at that time I was writing film scripts and I was looking at video as a possible cheaper technology to make projects because as we all know, film-making is such a long haul. Following this I began exploring video and the time-based arts in the mid '80s because I became much more interested in questions of avant-garde histories and textual practices and the 'adventure of form' in electronic image-making. Primarily my interest in video is an extension of the passion I have for the cinema and my interests in cinema - to me (to echo **Godard**) it's all cinema whether it be electronic or photo-chemical - it's all image-making and it's all an extension of writing. I am more interested in video and cinema as a form of choreographic writing - a choreography of expression with images and sounds. This explains my interest in time-based arts, especially video, because it is an incredibly elastic inter-textual medium to work with and it allows one to explore aesthetic, cultural and formal questions and pre-occupations much more readily than say, working within the social context of cinema in Australia as it was practiced in the '70s and now. It is a question of textual preferences, convenience, historical and cultural circumstances.

One of the more significant developments for me as an artist, critic and writer in the areas of culture, electronic arts and screen studies, is that I've opened up more to the imaginative possibilities of questions of inter-textuality, 'borderline' cultural production that deals with multiple spaces like, for instance, the post-humanist self-reflexive cinematic practices of **Raul Ruiz**, Jean-Luc Godard or **Chris Marker**. I'm much more interested in questions of poly-culturality, heterogeneity, displacement and cultural otherness.

Brian Langer: Are you interested in the areas of television and global media?

I'm very interested in the complex dialectic existing between local audio-visual production in the Antipodes and the cultural and technological ramifications of global media in international communication flows. There are very complex and multi-layered areas of intersections between culture, sociology, philosophy, institutions, gender and so forth, I'm always mindful of this situation when I make my artworks, but these concerns play a secondary role in the actual making of my video pieces. I'm much more interested in the aesthetic adventures of post - Godardian experimentation and subjectivity.

Have recent feminist interventions into film and video theory influenced your viewpoint on the development of new technologies?

Anyone who comes from a cinema background and is presently engaged in *film-making* as much as *video-making* and film and technological arts criticism, is indebted to the feminist screen theory produced during the '70s and '80s. Feminist film theory has been crucial in opening up the critical questions concerning spectatorship, representation, gender, class, sexuality, race and so forth. If you look at the emerging debates around virtual reality and cyberspace technology, a lot of the more engaging and probing critiques about these more recent manifestations of our techno-culture emanate from feminist circles. Arguably, this is because feminist debates are much more attuned to the phallogocentric and logocentric limitations of the Utopian discourses surrounding virtual reality.

Could you outline what you have *discovered* from the artists, curators and educators you've interviewed for your forthcoming monograph of video in Australia?

Well, in my research with past and present practising video artists, media artists, curators and educators that are interested in the new media arts, I must stress that the research foregrounds the hermeneutic significance of the theoretical debates central to the whole notion of historiography. Clearly, when one constructs a history it is important to be aware of the many theoretical and philosophical debates concerning illusionism, subjectivity, cultural imperialism and so forth. In my discussions with video artists from the '70s and '80s and more recently the early '90s, this has emphasised the importance, to me, of having a sustained continuity of cultural, institutional and pedagogic support for the electronic arts in Australia.

When you speak to artists who began in the '70s such as **Jill Scott, Randelli, Leigh Ilobba, Steven Jones, David Perry** and more recently (since the early '80s) people like **Peter Callas, Joan Brassil, John Gillies** and **David Chesworth**, they all testify to the problem of negotiating with a cultural amnesia in their practice and surroundings. In our media landscape video is still waiting to be recognised whether it be in the fine arts world, the cinema or in the world of community and alternative/TV media. Video art has always been relegated to the back seat.

This problem of cultural amnesia for Australian video artists, is the frustration that they have encountered in the past and the present, in the sense that they are always constantly re-inventing the wheel with video. It's been a fitful ruptured history of stops and starts, booms and bursts. Historically speaking, there has been a refusal, a denial of the continued presence of the media arts in the cultural landscape of this country.

You have interviewed many artists who have received Government funding towards the development of their work. In cultural policy areas of the funding of artists and the time based arts in Australia where do you think the pressure is coming from?

There are a few people, on a national and interstate level, who are interested in questions of cultural policy formulation and the articulation of policy pertaining to the technological arts. Unfortunately, historically speaking, most funders have been more attuned to the immediate,

direct needs of artists engaged with traditional two dimensional media art forms. So, in spite of the important interventionist role performed by the electronic media arts, such as the AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL (since 1986) and organisations like Electronic Media Arts (EMA) and Sydney Intermedia Network (SIN) in Sydney, Modern Image Makers Association (MIMA) in Melbourne and the Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) in Adelaide (and others), all these organisational and cultural spaces are effectively performing what I call 'salvation army' work. They are endeavouring to open up more and more new vistas of possibilities in the sustained and continued promotion of electronic arts - and that's the operative word continued; because we have very short memories in terms of what has happened in the past and what is possible in the future and in the present.

So, yes, institutional cultural funding spaces are slowly becoming sensitised to the funding, exhibition and critical reception of electronic arts in this country. It's a question of becoming more open to the possibilities of electronic arts as expressed on a grass roots level with the younger generation of electronic image-makers in this country, to what is happening in terms of the festival world and the pedagogic cultural sites in the northern hemisphere.

I think it's very important to be mindful of this dialectical relationship between the northern and southern hemisphere in terms of local audio-visual production. And I think this is one important objective the AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL has fulfilled and is fulfilling in introducing local electronic arts to the works of American, European, English and Japanese electronic image-makers since the '70s. There is much more of an effort there in building bridges.

As the editor, what have been the main concerns of SCAN+ ?

Since its inception in 1988, SCAN+ has been primarily interested in sites and debates around time-based arts in Australia because prior to that, the critical/cultural landscape in the promotion of electronic arts has been virtually negligible, particularly in terms of fostering video criticism in this country. Also, it has a polemical objective in a sense that it's trying to spearhead a cultural interventionist mode of thinking; of negotiating the dynamic presence of the electronic arts in Australia, so it has been a very important editorial platform to articulate the continued necessity for institutional funding support for the electronic arts. Also, and *most significantly*, it performs the role of an electronic switchboard, if you will, between local artists on an interstate basis across the breadth of this large country. So the journal itself is very interested in promoting 'rhizomatic' textual practices, in the context of critics, theorists, educators and artists - it has adopted an anti-binary, anti-homogeneous stance towards the electronic arts. And I think that's important to bear in mind - culturally and polemically - what SCAN+ is endeavouring to do.

In relation to your own video work, what are the critical, conceptual, cultural and stylistic concerns which you are interested in?

There are a number of fronts that I work on as a video artist. First of all, because of my life-long interest in surrealism and absurd theatre and absurd literature, I see video as a very ideal medium to explore my

aspirations and inclinations to surreal image-making. Specifically, I'm very interested in the whole notion of the surrealist critique of everyday life in terms of the poetry of the marvellous, the irrational, reverie etc because of my concerns since the '60s in European philosophy, particularly in thinkers like Nietzsche, Bataille, writer-auto-biographers like Michele Leris, philosophers like Foucault and Deleuze. I'm very interested in any kind of imaginative adventure or theoretical critique which talks about the laughter of the night and the notion of life as a surrealist cabinet of chance, randomness and inter-textual happening. So video, because it is a very elastic collage art form, gives me the opportunity to create an art that highlights collage stylistics, radical juxtapositioning and heterogeneity. By colliding cinema with literature, literature with philosophy, cultural theory with fine arts theory, poetry with architecture and so forth, video allows you to create these inter-textual spaces, themes and stylistics which enables you to articulate multiple vistas of imaginative possibilities. I have always been interested in visionaries like **Antonin Artaud** and **Andre Breton**, or poets like **Paul Eluard**, or **Pablo Neurada**, or painters like **Max Ernst** and **Henri Magritte** whoever theorised, wrote or painted under the sign of absurdism, surrealism and so forth. Since my teenage years I've been fascinated by these thinkers, visionaries, poets for a number of many complex autobiographic, cultural and philosophical reasons. Because of my bi-cultural subjectivity and my own personal circumstances, I've become attuned to the theoretical, lyrical, poetic structures and concerns of their works. And video, for me, as much as cinema, I must stress this, has given me the opportunity to articulate my interests in these realms of imaginative thought, intuition and poetic insights.

I've been very influenced by cinematic and literary influences. In terms of my video work I've been very keen to explore the possibilities of creating a 'surreal' iconography of my own interiority as a 'post-colonial' subject living here in Australia in the '90s. I think that's an important aspect of my work to stress. For example, from the '60s, I have been very interested in French avant-garde cinema practices, the historical avant-garde film-makers like **L'Herbier**, **Cocteau**, **Richter** and **Fischinger** etc and the more recent emergence of European auteur cinema of the '50s and '60s. I've always been interested in the works of Chris Marker, Jean Luc Godard and **Jacques Rivette** and many other film-makers, in one way or another, including 'dialectic' film-makers too, like **Alexander Kluge**, **Jean-Marie Straub**, **Daniele Huillet** and post-Bunuelian tricksters like Raul Ruiz. These film-makers have propelled me into the directions of seeking images and sounds which critique the humanistic foundations of western culture.

My influences have been **Jean Paul Fargier**, **Robert Cahen**, **The Vasulkas**, **Gary Hill**, **Bill Viola** and certain works by **Terry Flaxton**, **George Snow** and **Mona Hatoum**, to name a few. American video and performance artists like **Peter Campas**, **Vito Aconcci**, **Ken Koblin**, **Lynne Hershman**, **Joan Jonas** and **Tony Oursler** have been instrumental in shaping my ideas about video performance. It seems that as an artist I'm caught between the two vector forces of contemporary European and American video.

In terms of British video art, I'm very conscious of the cultural and aesthetic importance of British scratch video. Having seen **Ian Breakwell** perform some of his narratives, this has also stressed the importance upon

me of narrativity in video and electronic arts generally. In fact, I think narrativity itself is going to be re-negotiated with the current and future development of interactive arts. I am also respectful of **Jeremy Welsh** because he is that rare person who works as an artist/writer/theorist/educator/curator/critic: always trying to combine many different concerns at the same time. It's always a source of constant dialectical juggling. And finally, there is **David Larcher** who, like Fargier and Cahen has had an extraordinary impact on my ideas about electronic collage and mixing media - 'cine-video'.

You often collaborate with other artists in the production of single channel work and or installations. Could you comment on this activity and its importance to you?

Collaboration for me so far has been central to my practice as an image-maker be it in terms of cinema of video and installation. For me, I work with collaborators, who have similar, or empathetic ideas to me in terms of world views and conceptual frameworks. It doesn't mean I seek clones out there, but I work with people I regard as friends first, then as professional collaborators. For me, what is crucial for artistic collaboration is borne from intimate, conceptual and emotional dialogue.

What is your interest in video installation?

I like creating auto-biographical, cross-cultural spaces and theatrical spaces whereby the spectator can circumnavigate the audio-visual concerns of an installation in an interactive sense.

I like the idea of motivating the body of the spectator as much as using my own body in constructing installations. In the context of contemporary European avant-garde artforms, the body as a source of anti-binary, open-ended knowledge apropos of Deleuze and Guattari and others going back to someone like Artaud seems crucial for my approach to video installation.

I also like working with the dramaticity and plasticity of video installations. I like creating assemblages - machinic assemblages of plastic forms and conceptual intertextual spaces and concerns. I agree with René Payant that video installations are complex sites of multiple knowledges and multi-layered architectural forms. I've always been interested - irrespective of the medium be it literature, cinema, video - in multiple phantasmic spaces. Installations link together high and low art, art and technology, public and private spaces, in our 'post-media' epoch.

Also installation is significant in the sense of my ideas that go back to my cinema background in terms of mise-en-scene, of creating a multi-faceted theatrical space, of performance styles, speech, philosophical ideas and experimental ideas in terms of movement. I love the choreography of the invisible; the unfolding of the invisible. That to me is one of the main ideas in forming my artistic practice and theoretical writings. Movement, be it say in a Chris Marker movie or movement in terms of **Thierry Kuntzels'** or in **The Vasulkas'** work. Movement for me emphasises the thematics of the surrealist notion of possibilities of rupturing everyday life. If you move your mind and your body and you transgress the here and now in terms of your (un)consciousness, movement can have *untold* dimensions to it.

POSITIVE

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CATALOGUE

ARTISTS STATEMENTS

Controlled Substances II: Fourteen Days in Liverpool

Bluecoat Gallery
New Commission

Jon Bewley (UK)

Born 24.03.56. Lives and works in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England.

I lived for two weeks in rented accommodation in Liverpool. During this period, in the course of natural events, I met a number of different people. After my departure they were invited to construct a portrait of me using advanced portable computer technology.

This piece consists of laser print outs from Notebook P.C. Model 2000 System Package. This is a portable device used to construct portraits for use by security and police forces.

A limited edition print *Controlled Substances II: Fourteen Days in Liverpool* has been designed and produced by **Mark Haywood** and Jon Bewley and is available from Bluecoat Gallery.



Selected Exhibitions

- 1991 *Objects from the pocket of a man with more than one identity*, mixed media sculpture, *Post Morality*, Kettles Yard & Cambridge Darkroom, Oxford.
- 1990 *Untitled*, sculpture in the *Art Creating Society Symposium*, MOMA in Oxford.
- 1990 *Controlled Substances*, mixed media installation, TYNE INTERNATIONAL, Tyne and Wear.

This is a Bluecoat Gallery Live Art Commission funded by the ACGB.

White Light

Tate Gallery Liverpool
New Commission

John Conomos/David Haines (Australia)

John Conomos was born in 1947. David Haines was born in 1966.

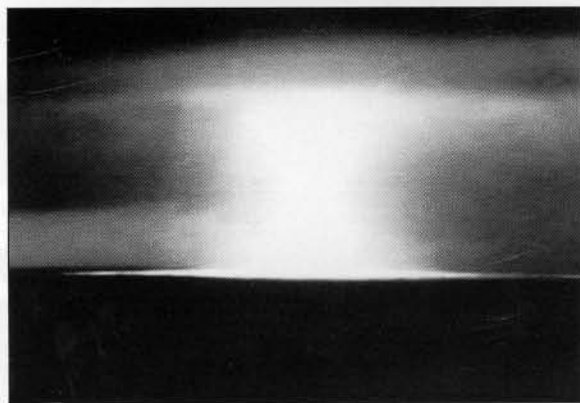
The Nineteenth Century European author/explorers of the Antipodes sought to dominate the country from its vast rugged coastline to its inner desert regions. Their obsessive quest for 'the great inland sea' epitomised a conquistadorial Old World approach to reading and subjugating Australian geography.

White Light reconstructs the visual technology of the camera obscura used in Nineteenth Century Antipodean exploration and mapping, and plays upon the intense psychotic experiences undergone by the colonial explorers in their journeys.

White Light also questions the notion of the Sublime in landscape which is evident in Western art, literature and thought. Too often the Australian landscape is represented as a site for 'Australianess', Eurocentric ideologies, orientalism and nature. *White Light's* highly abstract and self-reflexive images of Australian landscape and its murmuring sound track of excerpts from the journals of these explorers and from Spinoza embody this important idea that is starting to surface in (local) cultural criticism and audio-visual production.

White Light is preoccupied with the notion of landscape as estrangement. The colonial explorers of Terra Australis were drifting travellers caught in a spiral of delirium and obsession, seeking Western rationality in uncharted spaces. It is in this context that *White Light* also evokes Spinoza's ecological ideas on our environment as a field of forces, of natures made up of all kinds of interaction. Maybe our explorers felt like becoming - trees, rocks, creatures, etc. *White Light* speaks of these intense states of human existence.

This installation consists of 1 large wooden box, 1 lens, 1 book, 1 screen, 1 liquid display video projector, 2, U-Matic decks, 1 amp and 4 speakers.



Selected Collaborative Exhibitions

- 1992 *Museum of Fire*, three part video work with **Christopher Caines**, Australian Centre for Photography, included in: SECOND LANGUAGE, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; NEW VISIONS, Glasgow; VIDEOFEST 92, Berlin.
- 1991 *Untitled*, mixed-media installation, Camera Lucinda, Sydney.
- 1990 *The Algebra of Stars*, video installation, *Video Forms: Passages in Identity*, THE 4th AUSTRALIAN VIDEO FESTIVAL, Sydney.

Supported by the Australia Council for the Arts.

Men of Vision: Lenin and Marat

Tate Gallery Liverpool

Peter Callas (Australia)

Born 30.5.52. Lives and works in Australia and Japan.

Two large hollow three dimensional representations of the heads of Lenin and Marat are installed within a large dark space. Two LCD video projectors are located inside each head. These project outward through the eyes of the 'visionaries' onto four silhouette screens which are suspended from the ceiling. As the audience walks through the space around these images, they experience the sensation of walking through layers of history, as if actually confronting each figure. A highly layered fifth projection represents a kind of group portrait of the 'mechanics of revolution'. On turning from this final image, the viewer is confronted with the two faces of Lenin and Marat, staring back with the glow of the projector lamps apparent in their eyes.

The specially shaped screens are suspended and filled with animated movements. These moving sequences all suggest 'revolution' in the classical meaning of the word. The four suspended images are in different ways a solution to this problem of the ambivalence of objective and subjective points of view in the projection of images. In many senses the Soviet revolution is over and we can only now discover its 'true' outline in the same sense as realising the outline of a conversation. This termination has also meant that boundaries and borders (other words for outlines) are all hotly contested at the moment.

The fabricated heads camouflage the origin of the image - or rather they substitute one perceived origin (its point of manufacture) with another (the fantasised 'owners' of these images). As technologies, such as video, are never neutral, we need to be constantly conscious of their origins both in terms of their 'archaeology' as the German theorist Kittler has pointed out, and in terms of their point of manufacture. So we could ask 'who has the propriety right over the images we picture in and through technology?'



Selected Exhibitions

- 1991 *Selected Screenings*, Kunstverein, Cologne.
- 1990 1st BIENNIAL OF THE MOVING IMAGE, Reina Sofia, Madrid.
- 1989 *Retrospective Screenings*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The Sufferance

Bluecoat Gallery
New Commission

Lei Cox (UK)

Born 3.9.65. Lives and works in Dundee, Scotland.

My current work is closer to painting and photomontage: it is electromontage or electrography. I use video equipment to record the subject. Then, when I find the right action, I drop a few seconds into a digital video paints system. It's like vacuuming. You suck up hundreds of frames of the model or scene and empty the bag and chose the exact picture sequence. This means I can work with non-professionals, who look and are exactly right for the piece.

The Sufferance draws references from classical painters such as **Rembrandt**, **Michaelangelo**, **Leonardo de Vinci** and **Poussin** and their crucifixion scene paintings. By looking at their colours, composition and narration, I have built a seven screen video piece to re-create a modern crucifixion. The piece contains enjoyment and punishment acting as a warning for contemporary man and woman. There are, however, overtones of a Zen-like optimism of continual growth with hints of rebirth. The piece directly follows on from my video portrait work and in some ways is a full, life size video painting.

The five electrographs on show are presented as colour photos but they also exist as video looped moving pieces that are intended to be hung in the gallery behind false walls, in framed monitors. Some of these works can be presented as short television art pieces that contain linear narrative and musical accompaniment.

The images on show have been montaged and multi-layered using Quantel hardware platforms and reproduced electronically on slide film. The film is then placed under a conventional enlarger and processed on photographic paper. It feels good to collect portraits, backgrounds and subjects, to put them in an archive until the time is right to make a picture. It's more like painting and photography.

This installation consists of 7 monitors, 7 U-Matic decks, 1 sync starter.



Selected Exhibitions

- 1992 *Encubes*, VIDEOFORMES 92, Clermont Ferrand, France.
- 1991 *Magnification Maximus*, VIDEO POSITIVE 91, Tate Gallery Liverpool, England.
- 1990 *Giant*, stage set installation for dance group, touring UK.

Supported by the Scottish Arts Council, Quantel and The Television Workshop, Duncan of Jordanstone College.

In the Realm of the West Wind

Bluecoat Gallery

Ingo Günther (Germany)

Lives in New York, USA.

In this installation twin banners on flagpoles are blown towards each other. They are not flags themselves since their images change constantly. Often, one will seem to become the flag of the United States of America, the other, that of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. At other times these 'false flags' show the images of those nations' leaders and events specific to each country.

This work commemorates the swan song of the USSR and the birth of the alleged 'New World Order'. The world is being swept by two opposite tendencies: Globalisation and Retribalisation. The question of which of these forces will prevail, or if they will exist simultaneously has yet to be answered.

In a Retribalised world, the flag is the ultimate collective symbol which represents one's entire political unit: one's tribe. To dishonour the flag, is to attack the tribe. To fall beneath one's flag is to die a martyr. Whereas, in a sanitised, homogenised, consumer-safe global world, the flag is transformed from symbol into an empty sign ultimately representing nothing. In a global market such differences are interchangeable.

As Eastern Europe returns to the prejudices of the Thirties, so the Red Banner, with its identifying hammer and sickle, occupies the same position in world memory as does the double headed eagle of Imperial Austria. The United States of America, is desperately searching for something to give it a sense of identity. While many nations have contributed to the American melting pot, Retribalisation in the USA seems to be taking shape along ethnic or socio-cultural lines rather than according to the model of old world nationalism.

Text taken from copy by Peter 'Blackhawk' von Brandenburg.
(March 15, 1992, NYC)



This installation consists of 2 laserdisc players, 2 liquid crystal video projectors, 2 fans, 2 flagpoles.

Supported by the Goethe-Institut.

City of Angels

Tate Gallery Liverpool

Catherine Ikam (France)

(In collaboration with **Louis Fléri**)

'I am looking for the face I had before the world was made.' **WB Yeats**.

Today, 'intermediate' or synthesised beings and virtual environments interfere more and more with reality. The frontiers between the 'real' and the 'simulated' question our modes of perception.

City of Angels (La Cité des Anges) is a creative metaphor for these new sensory spaces - described by writers such as **Philip K Dick** and **William Gibson**. It goes back to the ancient belief in the existence of a *City of Angels* (a society organised by messengers mediating between gods and men) which is present in religions throughout the world. This installation is also partly dedicated to the film *Blade Runner*. It shows two generations of artificial beings programmed to pursue each other endlessly.

It is this universe of parallel realities, of synthetic beings, half-artificial, half-human which has inspired my work for several years: From *Device for a Video Journey (Dispositif pour un Parcours Vidéo)*, created at Beaubourg in 1980, which reflected a fragmented image of ourselves exploding into space, through to the virtual environment of *L'Autre*, created in 1992 for the Foundation Cartier, which illustrates an interactive meeting in real time with a computer-sculpted face, I have continued to search for the other side of ourselves, that which reveals to us the encounter between these intermediate beings which are, for me, modern day angels.

This commission is a modified version of a new piece originally produced for VIDEOFEST in Berlin, February 1993.

This video installation consists of 8 monitors, 4 U-Matic decks, 8 wooden plinths, 1 sync starter, amplifier and speakers.

Catherine Ikam is a painter, photographer and multi-media artist who exhibits internationally. Over the past twelve months, Ikam has become increasingly interested in virtual environments in which the spectator is part of the work.

Louis Fléri is an author, producer and director, he is notably co-author with Catherine Ikam of *L'Autre* and of a monumental video sculpture *Fountain of Images (Fontaine d'Images)*.



Selected Exhibitions

- 1993 *Images du Futur 93* Cité des Nouvelles Technologies, Montréal.
- 1992 *'Pixel Art'* French Pavilion, Expo' 92, Seville, Spain.
- 1991 *'Pierre Restany, le Coeur et la Raison'* Musée des Jacobins à Morlaix, France.

Supported by the Service Culturel de L'Ambassade de France
Delegation Culturelle Française à Manchester

A Bone to Pick

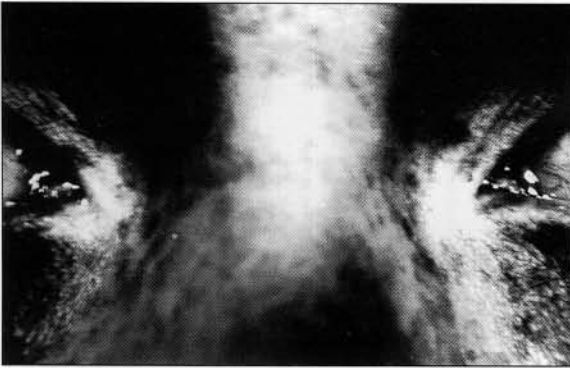
Bluecoat Gallery
New Commission

Shirley MacWilliam (Northern Ireland)
Born 13.11.66. Currently based in Liverpool as MOMART artist in residence at Tate Gallery Liverpool.

The material of *A Bone to Pick* was made during a period of return in Northern Ireland (funded as part of *Diaspora*, organised by Living Art Projects, Dublin).

There is an expectation of privacy, associated with 'home', which can reveal itself, in certain circumstances, as an insistent sense of territory. The strategies used to shore up a cultural security (or territory) encompass any number of defences: complicity, protestations of 'innocence', the determined activity of 'keeping your head down'. The work is pitched at a level of sensation in its attempt to deal with the experience of these coping mechanisms. The deaf nettle (on dry land) and the knotted wrack (in the wet) heckle the blind spot between the eyes.

Installation consisting of several light-boxes, 1 monitor and 4 speakers.



Selected Exhibitions

- 1992 *This Meere* (sound installation) Cheltenham Fellows Show, Pittville Gallery, Cheltenham.
- 1992 *Swarm* (multi-monitor and sound installation) LINE ONE VIDEO FESTIVAL, Prema Arts Centre, Uley, Gloucestershire.
- 1991 *em'brace* (multi-monitor and sound installation) Camera-work, London.

No Colouring Can Deepen The Darkness of Truth

Walker Art Gallery

Alanna O'Kelly (Republic of Ireland)
Born 9.12.55. Lives in Dublin, Republic of Ireland.

From a series of works: *The Country Blooms*
A Garden and a Grave

For a long time I have known of a need to take a look at the great Irish Famine of 1846-1848. The interest has been to do with this incredible event as a time of absolute change for us on this island.

The changes wrought on our language, our culture, our psyche, continue to impact on us as contemporary realities.

The issues of the Great Famine are alive monumental and devastating, here are areas of immense sadness, anger, humiliation, confusion, dignity and healing.

Our families' stories, memories, unspoken pain, fear and hurt lie everywhere. Patterns of history repeating themselves - Our story, yet, hardly talked about displaced, unsettled, denied and dispossessed.

A scattered people we share with others this despised experience. Similar conditions continue to write new Histories today. A common story we can begin to recognise, A common ground to heal.

Alanna O'Kelly,
Dublin, Sept 1992.

This installation consists of 3 27" monitors, 3 decks and one sync starter.



The Observatory

Tate Gallery Liverpool

Simon Robertshaw (UK)

Born 28.10.60. Lives and works in Liverpool.

The Observatory is the third in a series of installations: *From Generation to Generation* (1989), *Bio Optic* (1991) being the first of the two.

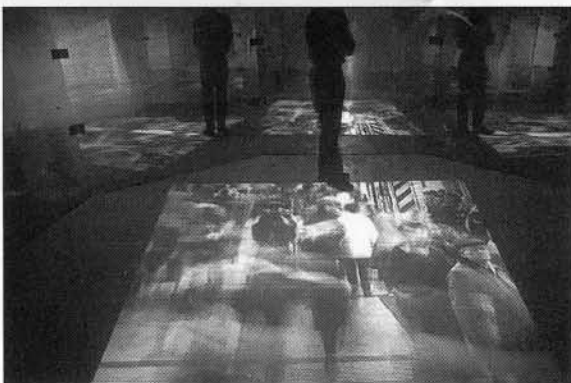
Many of my previous video tapes and installations have involved working directly with individuals, groups within psychiatric and special care and related issues. By understanding the complex histories of such institutions and the views represented by the hierarchy of medicine, I realised that this power/knowledge structure has developed throughout culture.

Theoretically, my work has been informed through the writings of Michel Foucault who in turn has led me to the work of Jeremy Bentham. In 1795, Bentham devised an architectural design/mechanism named The Pantopecton or Inspection House. This was a circular building with cells at the periphery and a central viewing tower from which a superintendent could keep the building under surveillance.

The Observatory is based on The Pantopecton and informed by a number of other discourses and technologies. Sir Francis Galton's theory of 'Eugenics' devised in 1883 refers to a mathematical analysis of heredity. His aim was to improve the human race by statistically calculating those groups of people which he believed should be prevented from breeding. The discovery of DNA has enabled scientists to map all the genes which make up a person. For many scientists, DNA holds the key to human heredity offering the identification and intervention of potential diseases and disabilities within the human body. As with the theory of Eugenics, so DNA based diagnoses are based on statistical prediction.

It is this reductionist view, evident in both Eugenics and the philosophy of DNA, argues that we are composed of small elements making up the larger picture. Such a belief negates any intrusion by consciousness, environment, culture or even history. This split, between nature and nurture, remains predominant in biology and science.

This installation consists of 7 perspex panels, 7 glass panels, 8 sensors, 7 slide projectors and 1 liquid display video projector.



This is a *Moviola/Oriel 31/Wrexham Arts Centre co-commission funded by the ACGB.*

Oracle

Tate Gallery Liverpool

New Commission

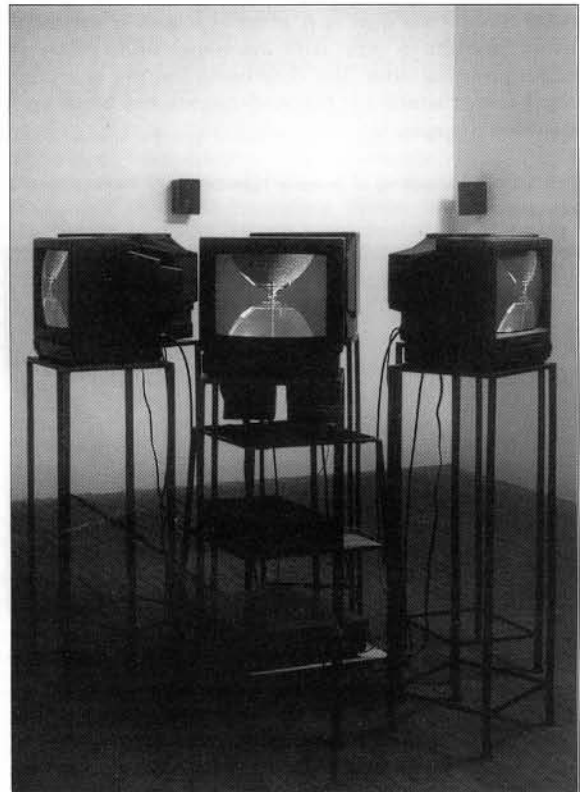
Barbara Steinman (Canada)

Born 3.2.54. Lives and works in Montreal, Canada.

Sand passing through an hourglass in real time plays on the monitors in a continuous cycle of filling and emptying. There is a hiss of sand against glass made from different tracks of breathing.

A voice is heard telling fortunes through the speakers encircling the monitors. *'Forgive and forget'* may follow *'Let the past guide your future'*.

This installation consists of 6 monitors and 12 speakers.



Selected Solo Exhibitions

1992 *Uncertain Monuments*, Galerie René Blouin, Montreal, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina.

1991 *Promissory Notes*, The Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff Galerie René Blouin, Montreal.

1990 Museum of Modern Art, New York (video installation), Mandeville Gallery, La Jolla, California.

Supported by Canadian External Affairs

The Conditions

Tate Gallery Liverpool
New Commission

Andrew Stones (UK)

Born 7.1.60. Lives and works in Sheffield, England.

The Conditions extends a range of concerns established in past works such as *Geiger* (1989), *Common Knowledge* (1989), *A History of Disaster with Marvels* (1992) and *Flare/Cataract* (1992). A fascination with science and its history is articulated alongside a sense of ambivalence regarding the more over-arching claims of academia. The work raises certain issues: that 'knowledge' is not neutral; that technology and science accrue political overtones in their cultural context; that progress by these means is not inevitable, and neither can the history of this progress be represented to us in an absolute form.

The characterisation of Nature as a separate realm of 'conditions' impinging on an heroic human domain of intellect is now commonly questioned in the light of environmental politics and ethical crisis. Human action contributes to surrounding conditions, which in turn affect further action. Progress cannot endlessly, neutrally push out into a finite world: the world pushes back.

In *The Conditions* a recurrent, iconic human presence appears in a panoramic video projection, alongside various terrains: forest, desert, solar atmosphere. Points of reference in a parallel academic 'terrain' are also presented, both in the video element of the work and in large, slowly turning 'cosmologies' cast by OHP units: stages of Robert Fludd's eloquent 17th Century cosmology; 19th Century herbalism; popular encyclopaediae and anatomical works. Elements such as equipment, cabling and racking are foregrounded in a geometric representation of anatomy.



Selected Exhibitions

- 1993 *Class*, installation, Kunst-Werke, Berlin VIDEOFEST, first shown at the Harris Gallery, Preston in 1990.
- 1992/93 *A History of Disaster with Marvels*, videotape broadcast by Channel 4; screened internationally including the 2nd ICA Biennial of Independent Film and Video tour.
- 1992 *Flare/Cataract*, large-scale installations, SHEFFIELD FESTIVAL.
- 1990 *The Tide*, large-scale installation, Posterngate Gallery, Hull.
- 1989 *Geiger*, installation, Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield.
Harvest Festival, installation, VIDEO POSITIVE89, Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool.
Common Knowledge, videotape screened internationally.

Funded by the ACGB.

Weightless

Open Eye Gallery
New Commission

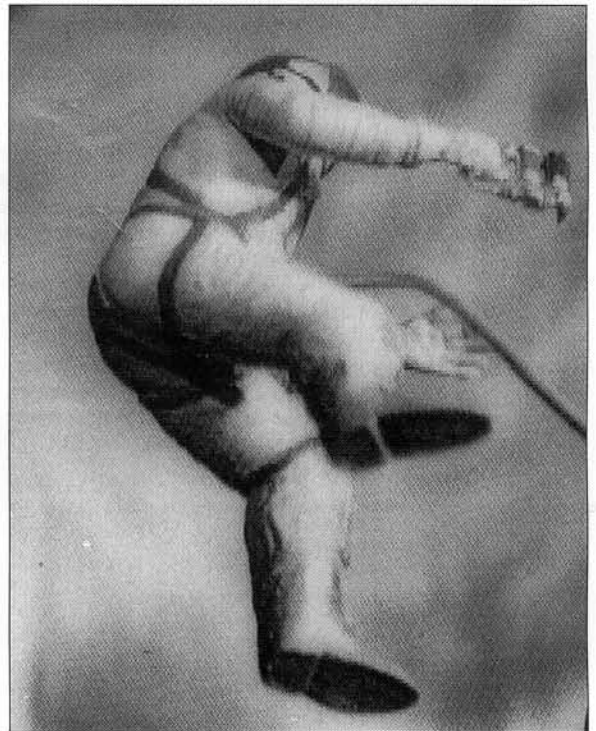
Jonathan Swain (UK)

Virgo. Lives in Brighton, England.

In 1969, whilst circling the earth at sixty miles a second, Yuri Gagarin, the first cosmonaut informed a relieved ground control that he could see no physical signs of a god. Perhaps his mind was befuddled by all the technology, dizzied by the centrifugal force or maybe he just wasn't looking in the right place. Twenty something years later, due to the political crisis in the former Soviet Union, the economic problems of NASA and the complete lack of a British space programme, we present a gallery based exploration into Star Wars technology, not research, but a dance into *Weightlessness*.

A two machine video dance piece.

Produced in collaboration with: **Mike Carney** who is a freelance dancer and film maker. **Julienne Lorz** who is a Liverpool based dancer and choreographer currently working on several collaborative works.



Funded by the ACGB.

Anger and Grace

New Commission

Cathy Vogan (France)

Born in Britain. Permanent resident in Australia for 17 years. Presently living and working in Paris, France.

As my work has developed, death, the unconscious, dreams, other-worldliness, odd behaviour, strange journeys, the limits of knowledge and madness have become the key issues, but these are evoked in courtship with an audio-visual river of life-flowing energy. All is strange and uncertain in such a world - our world - but for the certainty of life's rhythm, and what better a medium to imitate and conserve 'life' than with the freakish properties of video - at 25fps, a veritable psychological presence! In reference to the old man in my latest award-winning tape *Methuselah*, who is also featured here in *Anger and Grace*, I speak of the concept of 'play'.

I press that button and it's as if no time has passed since we recorded this; this image

Bears no print of Time.

Methuselah lives,

Undead.

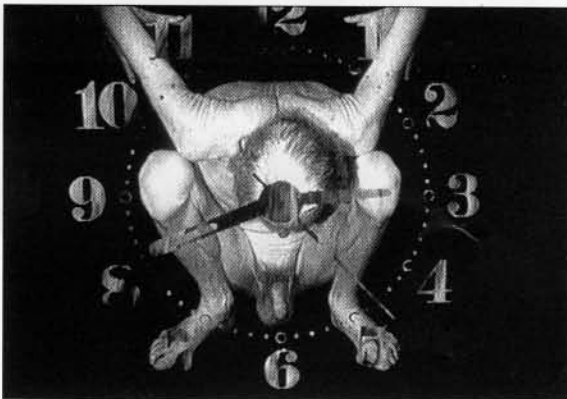
Loopy for all eternity

In ferromagnetic orbit around the great planet Tapehead.

Read me between the frames.

This is a multi-media installation comprising: 3 U-matic players, 2 small monitors, 4 large monitors, computerised dispatched system, 2 synchronisers (video and lighting/motors), 1 grandfather clock, 1 birdcage, 1 small table, 1 window-frame, 1 old couch, 2 motors, lighting and additional decor.

In the last 9 years Cathy Vogan has created 9 single tapes and 9 video installations, and since her arrival in France in 1987, has collaborated with her partner, **Dominik Barbier**, on several large-scale 'spectacles', while founding and participating in the development of the Paris-based Fearless Studio for the Electronic Arts in which she operates as artist/director and online editor.



Selected Exhibitions

- 1993 *Monstres Synthereels*, VIDEOFEST 93, Berlin.
1992/1 *Complicity*, 'Aspects de la Sculpture Video', Montpellier.
1989/90 *No Way Buster Project*, co-directed by Dominik Barbier, VIDEO ART PLASTIQUE, 5^o Manifestation International Video et TV, Montbeliard.

Corpus

Open Eye Gallery

Richard Wright (UK)

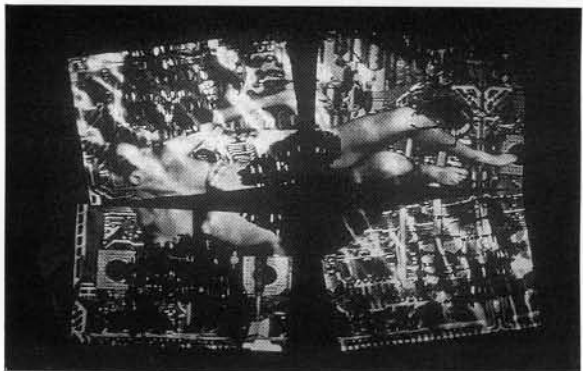
Born 6.9.63. Lives in Barnet and works at the City of London Polytechnic, England.

Highly sophisticated technological machinery such as computing and digital processing devices are beginning to blur the distinction between the organic and the inorganic. Along with 'artificial intelligence' we now hear the phrase 'artificial life', yet it is never made entirely clear in what sense these qualities have been made 'artificial'. The mysteries of the body are still unresolved after their reduction to the metaphor of the machine and now that technology is developing a mythology of its own, we continue to ask the question 'What am I?' in an age when the very nature of knowledge has changed.

Corpus is a video installation designed to simulate a body submerged under water and engaged in an act of self-examination using computer animation. The image is broken up digitally into four separate video monitors with each able to be manipulated independently. The spectator is able to move each unit around separately like a jigsaw puzzle, thereby changing their configurations so as to produce a perceptual rupture or perform 'video surgery' on the integrity of the computer simulated figure.

The monitors are placed on a circular base on which reproductions from Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* are printed. These anatomical drawings, which heralded the beginnings of modern empirical science, are edited together to make a kind of physiological map. With the aid of light-bulbs, the cabinets are turned into two-way tunnels of light, by which the animated figure on the top surface can be perceived to result from some technological transformation applied to the drawings underneath, or as some kind of telescopic sight which stimulates the objects it passes over into some kind of frenetic half-life.

This installation consists of 1 wooden base, 4 monitors, 4 U-Matic decks and 1 sync starter.



Selected Videography

- 1992 *Corpus*, Computer animation.
1991 *Superanimism*, (with Jason White), Computer animation.
1987 *Studies in Rhythm*, Computer animation.

Funded by the ACGB.

THE COLLABORATION PROGRAMME

The Collaboration Programme is a large-scale project unique in Britain, working regionally within communities and formal education.

Electronic Media Art practitioner, and Animateur Louise Forshaw, has invited several other practitioners to join her in work with the following groups. The result is the premiere presentation of seven installation's, one re-staging and four new single channel tape works; a progressive and inspired complement to the programme of international artists.

Seven installations are sited at the Grand Hall, Albert Dock, Liverpool and one within N.A.C.R.O. which is located in St Vincents Centre, Greetham Street, Liverpool.

Ashworth (North) Hospital, Maghull Patients group

The Self, Self Image

The work on exhibition has been put together by a group of individuals with a range of views on their self images. Some had never operated a video camera before, most had not had the opportunity to produce video art before and experience it's use in communicating a message.

'After several week's working through the human image in his environment, we progressed to individual images that we felt were pertinent to us.'

'The finished result is our statement, hopefully it will transmit a message to the viewer. Either way the experience has meant a lot to us!' The Patients Group.



The group had a positive commitment to the project. Much thought and energy went into what they saw as a unique opportunity to make their own statement and contribution to Video Positive 1993.

Collaborators include:

Patients Group
Simon Robertshaw
Ruth Preece (Arts Co-ordinator)
Brenda Jones (Patient Education)

**Knowsley Community College
School of Art & Design, Prescot
Centre
Pre-Degree Foundation Course**

BIOSPHERE

Initially, we the group arrived at the idea of the North and South of Britain, each having their own ambience. After thinking about the differences, we reached the concept of producing two rooms, no longer purely depicting the North and South but the contrasting paces of life and the juxtaposed environments in which they exist - one room reckless and claustrophobic, the other relaxed and open.

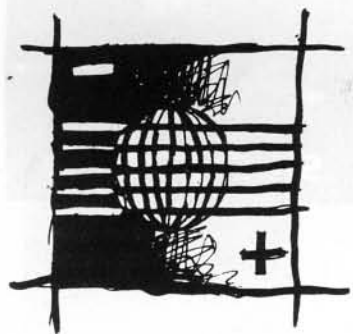
They appeared to us as two (Bio) miniaturised worlds (spheres) with separate identities, and atmospheres hence 'BIOSPHERE'.

BIOSPHERE is not an illustrated version of the two opposing worlds, more an abstract representation of our feelings and experiences.

The installation is designed to provoke emotions of a similar nature to our own, through sight, sound and touch.

Collaborators include:

**Gillian Birch, Richard Bryson,
Josef Cannon, Ann Dodd, Louise
Forshaw, Steven Gibson, Chris
McCabe, Sarah Murphy, Alan
Perkin, Philip Rhami, Richard
Thomas, Stuart Walsh.**



**Merseyside Centre For The Deaf
Silentview**

Life After Deaf

At a seance, three deaf people call on the spirit of their fellows past, present and future to advise them on living in a hearing world. In this near Deaf experience the participants use Sign Language to learn from each other the means of living, and self expression.

Sign Language provides continuity for Deaf people throughout the ages, from which they draw strength and identity.

This inward looking installation requires the viewer to shoulder their way into the meeting if they are to be fully involved.

In practical terms this has been an opportunity for members of the group to learn more about technology, whilst working together with other deaf people, exploring the possibilities of video as an artistic expression.

Collaborators include:

Glen Campbell, Kathy Cockburn, Gillian Fitzgibbon, Adam Gill, Shaun Hamblett, Betty Harvey, Gary Hunter, Colin Johnson, Barry Kirwan, Barry McIntyre, Jennifer Sealey.



**NACRO
Greetham Street, Liverpool**

Breakfast, Dinner, and TV

The theme of the installation is a Couch Potato character getting his/her daily dose of television. This takes place in a living room setting with three monitors arranged around the room. The screens depict and comment on the Couch Potato's daily diet.

Past and Present TV aims to take the viewer through the years. Keeping to a comedy theme this entails collecting snippets of programmes from the early Fifties through the Sixties, Seventies, Eighties and into the Nineties. This reveals how Couch Potato's humour has changed over the years and how television has played it's part in shaping that.

Video Box on the other hand depicts Couch Potato's view of television in general. This piece takes Couch Potato from sunrise to switch off time with an array of programmes on screen one, interviews with the viewing public on screen two and comments from people and sheep on screen three.

TV Funding gives Couch Potato insight into how he/she pays for his/her diet of television. Using the three screens as reels of a slot machine this piece shows where money for programmes comes from and goes to. Each spin of the reels will show the wins, losses and risks of programme making.

Collaborators include:

Ruth Adams, Peter Appleton, Simon Barrington, Adrian Borkwood, Julie Borkwood, Joe Braithwaite, John Carragher, Jason Carragher, Alan Condon, Mark Fleming, Sarah Haynes, Dave McCourt, Phil Murphy, Amanda Neary, Justin Quarless, Corrina Robinson, Mark Scott, Duncan Walker.



**St Helens Community College
Women Into Media**

PMTV

PMTV invites you to step into our alternative TV world, come with us as we channel-hop through a selection of our programmes.

Be amazed by the brilliance and innovation; no more mediocre TV *PMTV* is produced by women with serious talent. Relax and enjoy programmes which challenge, educate and promise to stretch your imagination.

Highlights include:

A look at the world of politics in *'Unlucky For Us'* - *'A propaganda video issuing statements about the 'achievements' over a thirteen year period, of a western democratic government'*, by C Thornton.

'A personal interpretation of how the TV has an effect on our lives', by J Manzanilla.

And the arts... *'Dead Meat'* - *Fragmented female body parts illustrate how the media never treats women as whole people'*, by R Johnson.

But ask yourself *'Are you watching the TV - or is it watching you?'* Women into Media.

Collaborators include:

Karen Baker, Sharon Collins, Victoria Conroy, Emma Decent, Jean Ebblewhite, Candice Fonseca, Louise Forshaw, Rebecca Johnson, Susan Joyce, Janice Manzanilla, Jacky McKenna, Eimer O'Hare, Catherine Robinson, Katherine Roocroft, Christine Thornton, Helen Turner, Jean Ward, Dawn Williams.



**Southport College
General Art &
Design/Foundation Students**

Sight Specific

Together, we are a group of nine students, and *Sight Specific* is the result of a collaboration of our individual ideas on how we perceive our environment.

It consists of a number of monitors placed face up on the floor of the space, in random configuration. As our work has been created with the advantage of multiple viewpoints, the viewer is invited to make a path of their own choice within our installation. The imagery and sound runs on a specific time cycle, representing both what is under the surface, and the progression of time within nature. 'Surface' in this instance being grass, which acts as a metaphorical 'carpet' under which issues are swept, only to rise again in another manifestation.

The images and sounds which occur at intervals within the cycle of the video, are the concerns and input of each individual in the group. Through a series of discussions around the agreed theme of the installation, we have contributed to the development of each other's ideas throughout the production.

Collaborators include:

Adam Bell, Steven Boland, Graham Cleminson, Robert Dodd, Louise Forshaw, Sue Gray, Stephen Maddock, Alison Porter, Sarah Schofield, John Whitelaw.



**Training and Vocational
Education Initiatives
Sandwell West Midlands**

Chicology (Re-Staging)

Chicology is one of a range of installations produced during the *Art Related Technologies* residential course, designed by TVEI in collaboration with Moviola, and held at Ingestre Hall Residential Arts Centre, Staffordshire during July 20th-23rd 1992.

The course provided the opportunity for twenty arts students (Post 16) in Sandwell, and twenty Higher Education students to engage in exploring new technologies and the arts, using video as the central medium.

Produced by three participants on the course, *Chicology* was inspired by the writing's within a Victorian book taken from the library at Ingestre Hall entitled *How to be a well dressed Wife.*

Collaborators included:

Jane Coalter PGCE Student, University of Central England
Jaswinder Kaur Khara 6th Form Pupil, Wood Green High School
Kerry Steen 6th Form Pupil, Wood Green High School

Electronic Media Art Practitioners:

Louise Forshaw, Clive Gillman, Lisa Mooney, Ruth Patchett, Pete Worrall.

Ingestre Hall Residential

Practitioners: **Maria Buckley, Darrell Wakelam, David Gowar.**

Art Related Technologies

Organisers: **Tim Wright** Advisor Art & Design **Cathy Village & John Ward** TVEI Co-ordinators

Re-stage Set Design: **Jaqueline French.**



**University Of Central Lancashire
Fine Art/Time Based Media
Students**

*'Quality Value'
RE:VIEW*

ASSUME, AUTHORITY, CENSORSHIP, CODES, COLLABORATE, CONNOTATION, CONTROL, DECONSTRUCT, DELETE, DENOTE, DISTORT, EDIT, EMOTIVE, EXCLUDE, FABRICATE, INFORM, JUDGE, LANGUAGE, LIES, MANIPULATE, MEDIA, MIS-INFORM, NARRATIVE, NEWS, QUESTION, RE-CONSTRUCT, SEMIOTICS, SUBLIMINAL, SYMBOLIC, TASTE, TRUTH, VISUAL.

Collaborators included:

Karen Allison, Sophie Black, Diane Clarke, Barbara Connolly, David Faragher, Laurie Keith, Haley Magee, Llinos Owen, Neil Percival, Jane Smith, Katy Suggitt, Bernie Velvick.



THE COLLABORATION PROGRAMME: SINGLE TAPE PROJECTS

SCREENED WITHIN RECORDED DELIVERY AT UNITY THEATRE.

Age Concern St Helens with Parr Community High School

My Age, Your Attitude

We are a group comprising older people from a day centre run by Age Concern St Helens, and pupils from Parr Community High School. As 1993 is 'European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations' we called our project *My Age, Your Attitude* with the intention that it reflects opinions from both age groups.

We have identified and expressed various experiences in the lives of members of the groups, in an attempt to challenge ageist stereotypes. This is a rare opportunity for us to get our views across, as well as learning new skills and boosting confidence.

Age is no barrier to participating in a creative initiative.

Collaborators include:
Josane Alexander, May Burrows, Joanne Butterworth, Jon Carsberg, Gill Ellison, Jean Hand, Robert Hussey, Esther Kain, Kathy Pilkington, Julie Shawbinns, Richard Thompson, Joanne Robinson, Mary



Aintree Youth Centre Oriel Drive

Our Generation

We are a group of young unemployed youths from Aintree, who have been given the opportunity through our local youth centre (unemployed club) and Moviola to make a video of some kind.

We decided as a group to find out what people thought of our generation. This will be an investigation into the youth dance culture of the '90s using video, animation and talking heads.

We produced this using our own knowledge and experience of youth culture, and have made this for fun and enjoyment. Through the video project we feel we have developed personally with skills, knowledge, and technical expertise to make something constructive and positive about the image of our generation.

We feel we would prefer to spend our time doing something constructive, enjoyable and interesting, rather than just hanging around doing nothing.

Collaborators include:
David Bretland, Ian Collins, Marc Connolly, Jimmy Cunningham, Adele Maddocks, Paul Niblock, Colin Weir.



Litherland Boys Club Crosby

Psycho Cyclists!

We have previously shot a number of short videos at the club culminating in a 20 minute documentary drama about drugs. The aim of this project is to build on this experience, developing the groups technical skills and to learn about editing.

The video is about a group of us meeting up and going out on our bikes. The viewer is taken on a tour of the Crosby area to places like the marina, canal and wood, interspersed with fast action shots of wheelies, jumps, and skids. It's all about showing young people enjoying themselves and creating positive images of Crosby.

Collaborators include:
Karl Bradshaw, Ben Dailey, Danny Dailey, Antony Fisher, Hayden Griffith, Peter Hankin, David Pendleton, Rebecca Owen, Jane Wood.



Sandfield Park School Sandfield Walk

The Unbeatables

'Reports are reaching us from all over the world that Mr Badguy is trying to take over. In Washington he is reported to have painted the White House black. Nearer to home in Liverpool Mr Badguy was last seen painting the Liverbirds purple!'

The Unbeatables is a computer animation by the students of Sandfield Park School. *'Using the Amiga Computer, we morphed ourselves into different elements and objects. We had to share the computers and help each other, so the cartoon and music is made by all of us.'*

Collaborators include:
Priscilla Alozie, Alan Bailey, Nicky Bennett, Michael Hawley, Diane Hobbs, Tracy Lang, Hayley Murray, Julie Myers, John Smith, Mark Stevens, Jane Wood.



SCREENINGS

ALL SCREENINGS
AT UNITY
THEATRE

Gender and Technoculture

A compilation of work from British and American women artists using technology to explore futuristic fantasy scenarios and lived experiences which challenge the assumption that advanced technologies perpetuate a male-only culture. Including recent works by British artists such as **Kathleen Rogers**, who in *The Art of Losing Memory* traces the relationship between low-tech lace-making and high-tech computerised imaging. American artists **Sandra Tait** and **Gretschel Bender** have produced *Volatile Memory*. Starring **Cindy Sherman**, this proto-type cyberpunk fiction has strong overtones of William Gibson's contemporary novel classic *Neuromancer*.



Involuntary Conversion by Jeanne Finley, 1991

Involuntary Conversion 9 mins

Jeanne Finley (USA) 1991

The Art of Losing Memory 9 mins

Kathleen Rogers (UK) 1991

Un-fit 1 min

Jo Pearson (UK) 1992

Sleep 8 mins

Catherine Elwes (UK) 1984

Volatile Memory 12 mins

Sandra Tait/Gretschel Bender (USA)

1989

The Houses that are Left 54 mins

Shelly Silver (USA) 1989

Curated by Steven Bode of Film and Video
Umbrella and Helen Cadwallader.

Work, Rest and PLAY >

This selective survey of recent video and computer art produced in Britain complements the launch of *This Side of the Channel*, this selective survey of recent British video and computer art. Entertaining, provocative, funny, eclectic, even apocalyptic, these tapes - from **George Snow's** exhilarating road video *Motorway* to *The Dreaming*, **Herlinde Smet's** conceptual piece exploring movement, light and space evocative of Aboriginal mapping - demonstrate the diversity and ambition of video artists currently working in Britain.

Motorway 20 mins

George Snow (UK) 1992

Pandemonium 5 mins

Simon Biggs (AUS) 1992

Proteus 8 mins

Robert Meek (UK) 1992

Many Scars 9 mins

Sophie Outram (UK) 1992

Edge 3 mins

Jo Pearson (UK) 1992

Bitter Root, Sweet Fruit 9 mins

Nicola Percy (UK) 1992

Proposition is a Picture 22 mins

Steve Hawley (UK) 1992

Losing 10 mins

Clive Gillman (UK) 1992

The Dreaming 8 mins

Herlinde Smet (BEL) 1992

Work, Rest and Play 18 mins

Pictorial Heroes (UK) 1992

Curated by Eddie Berg and Helen
Cadwallader.

This Side of the Channel

Programme Three

A major UK electronic image retrospective and state-of-the art survey, taking in the best of video art, computer animation and creative work for broadcast television. This programme logs into the constantly shifting network of British computer animation; a data-compressed journey through some of the most exciting and innovative developments with the new technologies. The programme represents the work of key practitioners whose contribution to the visual field has enriched our way of seeing the world. From totally synthetic 'virtual' sculptures to pixelated Tex Avery-style comic cut-ups, *This Side of the Channel's* focus on computer animation promises to be one of the highlights of the VIDEO POSITIVE 93 screenings series.



Stunt for Mutations by W Latham, 1991

Featuring:

Evolution of Form 4 mins

William Latham (UK) 1988

Biogenesis 5 mins

William Latham (UK) 1993

Superanimism 3 mins

Richard Wright/Jason White (UK) 1991

First World Boutique 2 mins

John Butler (UK) 1993

Durational Painting 4 mins

Anna Spelling (UK) 1990

Pear People in 'Car Race' 6 mins

John Kay (UK) 1992

A New Life 4 mins

Simon Biggs (UK) 1989

The Cruel Eye 3 mins

Andy Budd (UK) 1991

Flux 4 mins

I.e (UK)

Curated by Steven Bode of Film and Video
Umbrella.

This Side of the Channel

Programme Four

Virtual TV

Sit back, relax and prepare to be generally astounded by an imaginary hour of *Virtual TV*, a (*This Side of The*) Channel-hopping, zappers delight. Sixty minutes of the most innovative work to be found on British broadcast television.

Virtual TV showcases a number of stand-out pieces in the art/experimental television area (from series like *Ghosts in the Machine*, *One Minute Television* and *The Dazzling Image*). These short works (along with extracts from longer innovative arts documentaries) are presented alongside some of the most creative ads, titles sequences and station trailers etc made during the last few years, demonstrating the increasing cross-over between the 'experimental' and the 'commercial' arena and the continuing creative standard of the best British TV-oriented work.



TV Dante (3)

Featuring:

Late Show (Alexei Sayle-Not a Title Sequence) 1 min

Steve Bonnett/Keith Haynes

First Direct ad 1 min

Marc Ormes

TV Hell 'Sparks' 30 secs

Steve Bonnett/Keith Haynes

Late Show Wolf/BR Fabrics sequence 4 mins

Steve Bonnett/Keith Haynes

A Short History of The Wheel 1 mins

Tony Hill

Trout Descending a Staircase 1 min

Steve Hawley

Celtic in Mind 4 mins

Rose Garrard

Ghosts in the Machine (Title sequence) 30 secs

English Markell Pockett

The Assignment (extract) 3 mins

George Snow

A TV Dante (Canto 1) 11 mins

Peter Greenaway/Tom Phillips

TV Hell (It's a Knockout) 30 secs

Steve Bonnett/Keith Haynes

Hyperland 5 mins

Max Whitby

The Shock of the Neo 2 mins

Illuminations/Geoff Dunlop

South Bank Show 30 secs

Pat Gavin

Late Show Interlude 1 min

Steve Bonnett/Keith Haynes

Sentence 1 min

Steve Partridge

Stooky Bill 4 mins

David Hall

Uncertainties 10 mins

Diverse Productions

Late Show Phonetic Alphabet 30 secs

Steve Bonnett/Keith Haynes

Proust's Favourite Fantasy 1 min

Richard Kwietniowski/Roger Clarke

Manao Tupapao 1 min

Amanda Holiday

Seven Songs for Malcolm X 7 mins

Black Audio Film Collective

Absurd 4 mins

John Maybury

Late Show 3 mins

Steve Bonnett/Keith Haynes

Curated by Steven Bode of the Film and Video Umbrella and John Wyver (producer TV Heaven).

Telling Stories

Scanners of Memory

(A selection of recent video from Australia)

Any programme of video as art produced in the early 1990's is linked to a history of highly creative and personal experimental image making. A hybrid artform, video is an ever expanding modernist and postmodernist discourse involving notions of cultural production on a global level.

Since its early beginnings in the '60s and '70s the electronic image of video has evoked a transitional experience of reality and artifice for the spectator, creating dream worlds of temporal and spatial manipulations where mass media information is reconstructed as an expression of the 'self' and cultural mythologies and the human (sub)consciousness is fabricated within systems of technological exploration.

Video can also combine processes of technological manipulation with low-tech equipment or the digital integration of a diverse range of post-production techniques. This rawness, coupled with paradoxical confluences of mass media forms and genres provides artists with a radical and oppositional stance to mainstream media culture. This is evident in the following works: *Test* by **John Gillies and the Sydney Front**; *K-Rad Man* by **Ian Haig**; and *I Paint I Am* by **Michael Strum**.

In *Museum of Fire* by **Chris Caines**, **John Conomos** and **David Haines**; *Down to the Line* by **Marshall White**;

Sometimes by **Suzi Alesandra** and *Driving and Dreaming* by **Jane Parkes** the private self in the public sphere is exposed. The video image in close-up is linked by a face-to-face narrative of every day rituals and dreams (either spoken or as a silent rhythmic sub-text). This intertextual experiment in videographic inquiry subverts the relationship between object and subject, and the inherent control governing our ability to view and being viewed.

In **Jill Scott's** new work *Paradise Tossed* the ironic artifice of digital electronic imagining as a televisual and allegorical intertextual rendering of meditative landscapes of domestic technology cannot be avoided. The directness of this piece is transformed into a surreal investigation of female identity.



K-Rad Man by Ian Haig, 1992

Featuring:

Museum of Fire 45 mins

David Haines/John Conomos/Chris Caines (AUS) 1991

Driving and Dreaming 4 mins

Jane Parkes (AUS) 1991

Sometimes 5 mins

Suzi Alesandra (AUS) 1992

Down to the Line 10 mins

Marshall White (AUS) 1992

Test 3 mins

John Gillies & the Sydney Front 1992

I Paint I Am 1 min

Michael Strum (AUS) 1992

K-Rad Man 10 mins

Ian Haig (AUS) 1992

Paradise Tossed 13 mins

Jill Scott (AUS) 1992

VIDEO POSITIVE 93 acknowledges the financial assistance of the Visual Art/Craft Board of the Australia Council and the support of the Electronic Media Arts (Australia) Ltd, Brian Langer the curator and the artists.

Recorded Delivery

A compilation of tapes produced through *The Collaboration Programme* and other works produced by young people from across Europe. For details of *The Collaboration Programme* tapes see page fifty eight.

Featuring:

My Age, Your Attitude
Age Concern St Helens/Parr Community High School 1993
Our Generation
Aintree Youth Centre 1993
Psycho Cyclists
Crosby Youth 1993
The Unbeatables 1993
Sandfield Park

Curated by Louise Forshaw VIDEO
POSITIVE 93 Animateur.

Sound (from To Camera)

When it first appeared over ten years ago, the promo for Talking Heads' *Once in a Lifetime*, set a creative standard for the newly-emerging form of music video. Combining the latest in video technology alongside innovative formal devices, it features a show-stopping performance from head-head **David Byrne**.



She's Mad by David Byrne, 1992

The Eighties themselves saw a number of artists who took the music-video-and-performance combo off in new experimental directions. **John Sanborn's** rivetting *Ear to the Ground* (made with avant-garde percussionist **David van Tieghem**), **Akiko Hada's** witty, rapid-fire *Ohi Ho Bang Bang* and **Christian Marclay's** *Record Players* are all pieces that explore the possibility of a new kind of 'visual-music' in which the performance fundamentally shapes the structure of the soundtrack.

In recent years, the tendency for collaborative projects by visual artists and musicians/dancers is represented in a number of dance-based pieces, including those directed by **John Maybury**, **Mike Stubbs** and **Pascal Baes** which all use the twists-and-turns of the camera to add a dramatic new element to the performance. The programme closes with the recent promo for David Byrne's *She's Mad*: proof that Byrne has lost none of this

gift for virtuoso set-piece effects and a fascinating glimpse of the potential interaction of performance with the world of digital and computer technology.

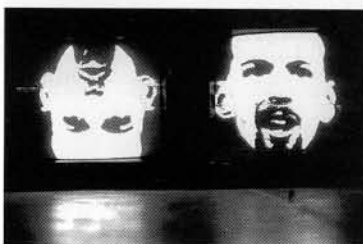
Featuring:

Once in a Lifetime 4 mins
David Byrne/Once in a Lifetime (USA) 1982
In Re Don Giovanni 4 mins
Jeremy Welsh/Michael Nyman (UK) 1982
Blue Dance 6 mins
Alter Image (UK) 1986
Ohi Ho Bang Bang 5 mins
Akiko Hada/Holger Hiller (UK/GER) 1989
Topic 1 5 mins
Pascal Baes (FR) 1990
Sweatlodge 8 mins
Mike Stubbs (with Man Act) (UK) 1991
Tunic 5 mins
Tony Oursler/Sonic Youth (USA) 1990
Record Players 4 mins
Christian Marclay (FR) 1991
Topic 2 5 mins
Pascal Baes (FR) 1990
Ear To The Ground 5 mins
John Sanborn/Mary Perillo 1986
Ecco Homo Promo 10 mins
John Maybury (UK) 1986
She's Mad 4 mins
David Byrne (USA) 1992

Curated by Steven Bode of Film and Video
Umbrella.

Student Programmes One and Two

Programme One Sheffield Media Show 93 on Tour



The *Sheffield Media Show* is a major showcase for new work by emerging artists and students from Media Art Courses throughout this country and Europe. This year work was specially commissioned for the show, including performances and installations. A central theme to the show was a symposium entitled *Incisions* considering the body in relation to time based art. This programme reflects the variety of programme themes which ranges from 20 minute narrative films to 40 second animated computer sequences.

Programme Two

Contemporary student work from a selection of Art Colleges and Universities across the UK which encourage innovative and creative approaches to new media. With work still in progress for assessments and degree shows, this programme promises the very latest and hottest-off-the-editing-suite selection of student work offering an exciting and diverse range of formal styles and contentious issues.

Curated by Rebecca Owen and Sheffield
Media Show.

The Passing

54 mins

Bill Viola (USA) 1991



Photo: Kira Perov

Bill Viola's extraordinary new piece, *The Passing* is arguably the most important video work of the last few years. Startling, lyrical, profound and powerfully, authentically moving, it is, in many ways, the perfect expression of Viola's artistic vision. Full of spectral visual phenomena and impressions from the edges of consciousness, *The Passing* inhabits a penumbral world between dream and reality; between waking and sleep. Throughout the tape Viola's unquiet slumbers are interrupted by surging, primal memories; and then when brought sharply awake, by intimations of mortality. These fleeting thoughts are brought more clearly into focus via the footage of Viola's family and, in turn, connected up to the passage of the generations and the ceaseless cycle of birth and death. Viola's imagery more than matches his themes: disclosing a haunting black-and-white world of almost hallucinatory velvet beauty. Rarely, if ever, has video been so visionary in its mood, so poetic in its language and so powerful in its emotional impact.

White Homeland Commando

63 mins

Elizabeth LeCompte (1991) USA

For over fifteen years, the ensemble of New York-based artists known as the **Wooster Group** (whose members number **Jim Clayburgh**, **Willem Dafoe**, **Spalding Gray**, **Elizabeth LeCompte**, **Peyton Smith**, **Kate Valk**, and **Ron Vawter**) have created a series of theatre works that are both televisual and theatrical in scope.



These works deploy film, video, music, dance and written text in a collage form that is heavily dependent on outside media elements and amplified sound for the way they are shaped on stage. *White Homeland Commando* is the group's first full-length video piece conceived completely outside of a live performance. It revolves around the infiltration of a white supremacist organisation by a special unit of the police and is constructed in a challenging cross-cutting style in which the complex inter-connected plot-lines are developed alongside more familiar TV thriller conventions. Powerful, provocative and starkly compelling, *White Homeland Commando* is a highly original and impressive work that makes one look forward to further Wooster Group video productions.

Liquid TV

A cannibalistic house named Thomas hangs out with a housing inspector who's out to close him down. Two all-American kids, *Billy and Bobby*, get their kicks playing 'frog' base ball. Uncle Louis is endlessly flushed down the same toilet. A woman visits a public toilet

and ponders on the subtleties of cubicle etiquette. And, *Doktor Zum* proves that archeological excavation may just be a nice name for search and destroy. Welcome to *Liquid TV*.

Liquid TV is constantly moving. It flows into areas the rest of us thought were too 'politically incorrect' to touch. Simply put, this is not talking head animation. *Liquid TV* defies traditional narrative structures in favour of a format that mixes humour with abstract ideas and experimental formats in a formidable cocktail to produce what can only be described as 'animation with attitude'.

This programme of progressive animation was originally screened on American MTV and includes both American and British animation.

The programme includes new animation from award-winning animator **Candy Guard** and **Stick Figure Theatre**. Whilst *Bobby and Billy* provide an on-going saga in the form of *Party*, *Winter Sports* and *Soap-Box Derby*. Other improbable titles include; *Elvis Meets the Spider People from Hell*, *Dog Boy*, *Beavis and Butt-Head*.

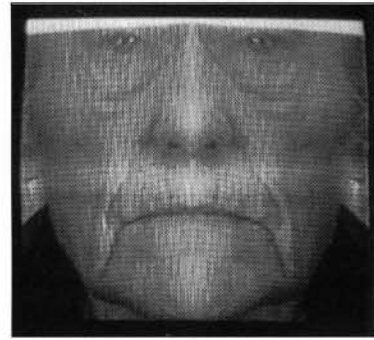
Curated by Eddie Berg, Steven Bode and Irene Kottarz.

Wax, or the Discovery of Television among the Bees

85 mins

David Blair (USA) 1991
(16mm/video)

Over six years in the making, **David Blair's** *Wax or the Discovery of Television among the Bees* is experimental film-making at its most ambitious and inventive, and a fascinating pointer to the way in which new electronic technology is impacting on film and video work. Blair's hero, Jacob Maker, is an operative at a US military base in the Alamogordo Desert (the birthplace of the Plutonium bomb). Jacob spends his days working on the design of high-tech weapons systems, until an interest in bee-keeping inherited from his father



(William Burroughs) leads him to discover a sinister secret pattern unfolding that he is unable to evade. Told in an oblique visual style that combines archive material with brilliantly-integrated virtual reality and computer graphic sequences, *Wax* is a highly original tour-de-force that offers an intriguing glimpse of the 'electronic cinema' of the future.

What You See is What You Get

Programmes One and Two

What You See Is What You Get explores the changing image of politicians in today's increasingly media-dominated age. Featuring a diverse selection of material from Britain, the United States and the former USSR, the programme illustrates ways in which political figures (and their advisors) use the media to present carefully-controlled images of themselves. It also reveals how today's electronic technology can cut through the illusion to show politicians' unintended, often unflattering moments.



Highlights of over two hours' worth of material include extracts from the American cult movie *Feed*, which features covertly-captured satellite footage of Presidential candidates

Clinton, Bush and Perot in a series of off-guard on-camera moments in the midst of the campaign trail. Other recent examples of 'scratch'-style video pieces from 'media hackers' in Britain and the USA show alongside a selection of party political broadcasts from both sides of the Atlantic, while a number of longer pieces analyse the phenomenon of the modern media politician, notably the remarkable *TV Boris and Video Misha*, which cleverly dissects the contrasting profiles of Yeltsin and Gorbachev at the time of the Soviet coup

Programme One:

Perfect Leader 5 mins
Max Almy (USA) 1982
Feed (extracts) 10 mins
Kevin Rafferty/James Ridgeway
Death Valley Days (Secret Love) 5 mins
Gorilla Tapes (UK) 1984
Tory Stories 5 mins
Peter Savage (UK) 1992
Blue Monday 4 mins
Duvet Brothers (UK) 1984
Hack Pack on the Road 10 mins
Late Show pre-election items (UK) 1992
We Will Rock You 2 mins
Emergency Broadcast Network (USA) 1992
US Campaign Commercials 1950's - 1990's 10 mins
 Compiled by **Marshall Reese/Antonio Muntadas**
Party Political Broadcasts 10 mins
 (incl: *Kinnock - The Movie* and *John Major - The Journey*)

Programme Two:

TV Boris and Video Misha 43 mins
Akos Szilagyi/Peter Gyorgy (Hungary) 1992
Zygosis 26 mins
Gavin Hodge/Tim Morrison (UK) 1991

Curated by Steven Bode of Film and Video Umbrella.

Sexual Visionaries Programme One

Sluts and Goddesses

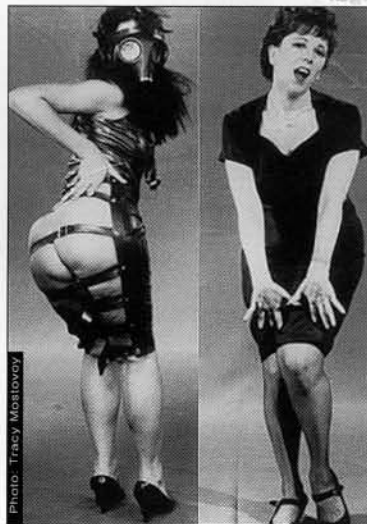
In *The Leap (No Leap)*, **Akiko Hada** presents us with a beautifully executed piece of work about the struggle for a young woman to exert control over her own body in a culture that denies its power. With

references as diverse as Sappho, Aleister Crowley, Susie Orbach (author of, *'Fat is a Feminist Issue'*), 'Nature' and S&M.

Annie Sprinkle is a consummate artist, Post Porn modernist, Sex Goddess of Manhattan, porn-star turned performance and video maker. This programme includes the results of her last workshop for women, the enlightening 52 minute videotape, *The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop or How To Be a Goddess in 101 Easy Steps* (1992) co-directed with experimental New York film-maker **Maria Beatty**. More than a document, this hilarious and visually stunning video is a liberating journey into women's sexual and spiritual pleasure.

The Leap (No Leap) 20 mins
Akiko Hada (Ger) 1993
World Premiere

The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop or How To Be a Goddess in 101 Easy Steps 52 mins
Annie Sprinkle/Maria Beatty (USA) 1992



Curated by Kathleen Maitland-Carter in association with London Video Access.

Sexual Visionaries Programme Two

Illegal Love Bites

'People must sometimes be protected from themselves', Judge Rant, the Spanner Trials. In 1990, sixteen gay men were convicted of consensual sex practice (eleven of whom were charged with 'assault' and given prison sentences) as a

result of an investigation by the Obscene Publications Squad named 'Operation Spanner'. All of the 'offences' occurred with the full consent of the participants and in private. In December 1992, the *Spanner* case went before the House of Lords on appeal and the results are imminent.

This international programme of videos questions the role of the body and sexual freedom in contemporary culture. These are videos that enquire into issues of gender, identity, sexuality, state control of our desires, dread of sex and AIDS.

Featuring:

Pars Pro Toto 13 mins
Veit-Lup (GER) 1991
A Spy (Hester Reeves Does the Doors) 5 mins
Suzie Silver (USA) 1992
My Body is a Metaphor 8 mins
Stacey Friedrich (Can) 1991
Anthem 10 mins
Marlon Riggs (USA)
When I Grow Up I Want To Be Beautiful 6 mins
Franko B. (ITALY) 1993
British Premiere

Curated by Kathleen Maitland-Carter in association with London Video Access.

PERFORMANCES

Epitaph

Bluecoat Arts Centre

Robin Blackledge (UK)

'If you would indeed behold the spirit of Death, open your heart wide unto the body of life. For Life and Death are one, even as the river and the sea are one... For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?' Kahil Gibran. (The Prophet).

A fusion of stylised performance, conceptual theatre and video posturing as 2D moving image. This installation, which incorporates performance and audience viewing areas, challenges traditional modes of viewing conceptual theatre by physically defining the audience's field of vision. A parallel can be made between this definition of space in theatre terms and the focussing of space used in television, 'the Cathode Ray nipple' which supplements real life experience. Perhaps that for a great proportion of us, TV has become synonymous with the need to conform and suppress our individuality, a 'secondary reality' which creates dialogue with our own perceptions of 'truth'. The choreography in the piece uses these concepts as treatment within a visual poem that deals with the omnipresent fear of mortality.

Epitaph is a rendering of our final moment of existence and our imagination of what lies beyond. The compression of one's life into a millisecond, and the expansion of this millisecond into eternity.

Performers: **Robin Blackledge, Chris Curran, Julianne Lorz, Helen Parker** and **Liam Scott**. Soundtrack by **Bruce Douglas Bill Curwen**.

*The Disposable Heroes Of Hiphoprisy

Funded by New Collaborations/Arts Council of Great Britain and North West Arts Board.



How to Act Better

Bluecoat Arts Centre

Annie Griffin (USA)

Annie Griffin makes her debut in Liverpool with a camera, a cameraman and a company of artistes for an evening of 'basic strategy' for the performer.

How to Act Better is a practical look at the ancient profession of pretending to be someone else in public, combined with the mysteries of the screen actor's love affair with the lens. With the help of cameraman **Pete Coley**, Annie lets us in on a few secrets of the stage and screen. *How to Act Better* also features three of Annie's favourite young actors, **Will Brook, Eliot Giuralarocca** and **Oliver Senton**.

Prior to the VIDEO POSITIVE festival, Annie Griffin will spend three days at The Tate Gallery Liverpool, working with local artists and actors to create a 'Performance in the Guise of a Guided Tour at The Tate'. Some of these performers will also feature in *How to Act Better* at The Bluecoat.

Annie Griffin is a London-based artists who makes devised work for the stage and screen. Recent productions include *Almost Persuaded* about a country love song, *Shaker* on the life of the founder of a celibate sect, *Skylark*, a stage show with 5 short films and *Headpieces*, a series of short films for MTV.

A South Bank Centre commission, touring with the aid of The Old Museum Centre, Belfast, VIDEO POSITIVE, Bluecoat and Tate Gallery Liverpool, Contemporary Archives Festival, Nottingham and Tramway, Glasgow.



The Last Broadcast

Near Salthouse Dock Quay

Solid State Opera (UK)

The 'death ray' is no longer the figment of a science fiction writer's imagination. It is here to stay, all about us in our world: unseen, unheard and largely unregulated. Radio waves are a bigger threat to mankind than nuclear weapons, the ozone factor and just about every other ecological threat put together. There is no place on earth that escapes the radio wave and yet we still have no answer to the devastating effects of the X ray, the gamma ray or micro wave, and as scientists push forward towards their obsession for ever higher and potentially more dangerous frequencies, we innocently contribute to this global disaster by insisting on more satellite communications, broadcasting freedom, microwave tele-systems, with the Utopian promise of earth as a global village.

An acceleration towards total radio chaos seems unstoppable as we enshroud the globe in an unpenetrable mesh of radio activity, its suffocating and frazzling effect generation an era of magnetic storms and cosmic noise, and where human life will disintegrate for ever. One day, the only evidence of mankind will be in its electronic image.

The Last Broadcast is in three acts: Life, Half-life and After-life.

Supported by the New Collaborations Fund/ACGB and sponsored by Owen Brown Tents for Events Ltd.

